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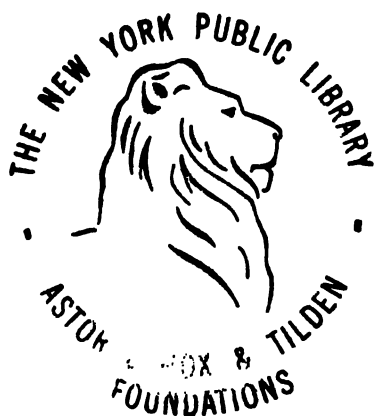
Rose of Auzenburg

# The Rose of Auzenburg



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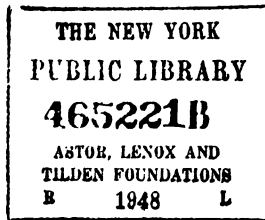
# THE ROSE OF AUZENBURG

BY  
M. F. LATHAM NORTON *a*



BROADWAY PUBLISHING CO.  
*835 Broadway, New York*





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**CAST OF CHARACTERS.**

**Ferdinand III.**

Emperor of Auzenburg and King of Athol  
Count Van Hellick } ..... Prime Ministers  
Baron Von Bertrom }  
Lord Ravenswood ..... British Ambassador  
Lady Ravenswood ..... his wife  
Marie d'Auchausen ..... an American girl  
Harold Huntington ..... her cousin  
Antonio Weibenovitch .... Secretary to his Majesty  
Otto von Weiben ..... the Emperor's aide  
Ivan Nacoli ..... a Russian Prince  
and minor characters.



# The Rose of Auzenburg

## I.

### SCENES OF THE PAST.

"Sire, what answer shall we submit to his Majesty's special Ambassador?"

Dead silence reigned for a moment. Then the young Monarch whirled in his seat, his face white with passion; he brought his clenched fists down upon the table with such force that the Chancellors startled as if from the prick of a thousand needles, and cold shivers played up and down the spine of the Secretary.

"I tell you, I refuse to liquidate the debt, that way. I will not promise to wed a woman, I do not love—yes, I said love—better than my country or my crown. And I will choose my own bride; I will not leave the choice to you—you who think only of your own gain—no—that, I swear to you!"

Von Bertrom centered his gaze on the floor uneasily.

Van Hellick was the first to find his tongue:

"But, your Majesty——" he began.

"There is no more to be said about it. I have already given you my answer," snapped the Emperor, with undisguised irritation. An alliance, such as you

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suggest, would not benefit my country, and, even if it would, I will not be sold to pay the price."

For an instant, the eyes of the statesmen met, one conciliatory, wavering, the other hard as flint. The Athol Chancellor loved his sovereign too well to force upon him a distasteful project; the Auzen Chancellor thought too much of the country and of public aggrandizement to let pass a chance to strengthen Auzenburg.

In the year 18—, a very careless Ministry had permitted the dual-monarchy of the Balkans to fall tributary to Moslem rule. Finally, an agreement was reached—thirty-million crowns was the price of freedom. Austria welcomed the opportunity of shouldering the debt, thereby lessening Turkey's foothold upon the Continent. 'The Raven' at once bought up the certificates, issued for the loan, by Auzenburg-Athol, giving the country ten years, in which to gather the necessary funds for liquidation. Thus, Austria promoted her own deep-laid schemes, and gave friendly aid to a neighbor in distress.

A short time before the Moslem yoke had fallen upon the country, Auzenburg had engaged in a short and bloody war against a neighboring kingdom. The war debt thus incurred was heavy. For certain funds, the Duchy of Annaistane was pledged as security to the Kingdom of Cozhurst. Turkey refused to shoulder any debts, contracted by her conquered territory.

After the Turkish yoke had been thrown off, Auzenburg, confident of her ability to meet both debts in ten years' time, was not careful of her public funds, but engaged in continual costly squabbles, and, when Emperor Utricht met his death at the hand of an assassin, he left to his son a wild and turbulent em-

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pire, ten years' renewal of both loans, and, over all, a lingering shadow of the Sublime Porte.

The new monarch, a dark, frail boy of eighteen, was the idol of the nation. He had no sooner assumed the crown than an entire change of policy was inaugurated—a new cabinet was formed; public offices were investigated and placed in more competent hands. The whole nation participated in the change. And, at the time, it seemed that—unless some unforeseen calamity befell the country—Auzenburg-Athol bade fair to meet both debts in the specified time without difficulty. However, the Ministers devised what they considered a better plan—if the Emperor should marry a foreign princess, her dowery would doubtless exceed the debt to Cozhurst, and could be used for the purpose of liquidation. Such an alliance would strengthen the monarchy. The desired offer had just been received from the Kingdom of Cozhurst itself. The ruler offered to cancel the debt in the event of the marriage of his niece, and heir to his throne, with the Auzen ruler. The Auzen ruler had just given the decision we have recorded, to the Ministers.

Van Hellick, or Iron Mask, as he was familiarly called, faced the defeat of his cherished scheme with apparent calmness. His own face inscrutable, he read, line by line, that of his Royal Master.

Emperor Ferdinand, chin in hand, his gaze riveted on the lake beyond the window, was lost in thought. A shadow fell across his forehead; his heavy-lidded, dark blue eyes were half closed; the pallor of his olive skin was noticeably accentuated by recent illness; one thin heavily-ringed hand was closed over a leather-bound edition of Kant—a figure, he presented, well worth studying.

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To one, less regal, the close scrutiny of the Auzen Chancellor would have been disquieting, but Ferdinand seemed unconscious of the fox-like stare.

"He is only a lad," thought Iron Mask with a derisive smile. "His opinions are as yet unformed. True, that angle of the jaw is disquieting—it may prove troublesome—it means self-will, but, by and by, we shall see. He lacks the physique of his father, and his mouth is a trifle weak."

Slav and Teuton mingled strangely in the Hohenstaufen Line, from which, the Emperor sprang. The race was wild-natured, passionate, restless, warlike—unsoftened by centuries of civilization; in temperament, inclined to sombreness. A ray of Celtic tenderness, however, gleaming down through the centuries, somewhat softened and irradiated the House of Athol. His mother had been an Atholian and, from her, the 'weak mouth' was inherited. The heart of the Hohenstaufen over-ruled the head—a consequence of the mingling of races,—and impulse was the strongest characteristic.

Van Hellick quickly formed his plans. The enmity, which existed between Cozhurst and Auzenburg, could be terminated in no more satisfactory way than by the proposed Cozhurst alliance.

The Kingdom of Cozhurst lay to the West. In unruliness, the people were second only to those of Servia. The King was a bachelor, infirm and old, but feared and hated alike, because of his despotic spirit. Why King Lois had so readily offered to cancel the debt under the said conditions, the Chancellors were at a loss to surmise. That Cozhurst would respond to the intimation that the Emperor was casting about for a prospective bride, had never occurred to them. The Emperor, wholly unsuspect-

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ing the scheme afoot was angered beyond measure when the letters of the Cozhurst Chancellor were laid before him, and was even more angered on the arrival of the special Envoy.

To the Cozhurstian's last communication, Van Hellick's answer was both satirical and diplomatic. The two were well known to each other, and expressed themselves freely concerning the project afoot.

"I have on hand, Markenstein, a young lion to tame. I—even I, feel my hair rise at times. This young Napoleon of ours is too much for the sober head of my colleague, and the burden of taming, I see, is all on my shoulders. He says 'I will' and 'I will not' with surprising promptness, ach! For the sake of ourselves, we had better let the storm blow over at present; but accept my word for it—he shall be brought to terms. The alliance will benefit my land; it will benefit yours. We will put our heads together. Ten years—we have ample time for the taming. Youth is obstinate, but age and wisdom shall prevail. He is at the romantic age when love seems paramount, ach! and then—he is noted for a vein of caustic wit:

“So runs the frowzy world away,  
For cats will mew and dogs will bay,  
And even kings will have their day.”

“Let us look forward to the time when our nations can unite against Moslem invasion, and the land-grabbing schemes of the ‘allied powers.’”

\* \* \* \* \*

Near an old Virginia village, on an afternoon in Autumn, an artist had converted the lawn before his cottage into a studio.



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This artist was a tall white-haired, old man, and the fine net-work of lines upon his brow bespoke a scholarly and thoughtful life. Silver maple leaves floated down about him as he worked untiringly upon the canvas.

The picture was a master-piece of art—An old feudal castle with many turrets and a shining moat against a back-ground of sunset hue. The building and surroundings gave it an unmistakably foreign atmosphere.

At last, a sound aroused the painter. He straightened his figure and looked toward the cottage.

The rough, brown-stone structure was quaint and pretty in the ruddy light; a sand walk led up to the steps, and, on either side, a row of white chrysanthemums stretched from the rustic wicket gate to the cottage steps. A little girl, of some ten or twelve years, came down the path from the door-way—her slender arms laden with the snowy flowers. Her glance was bent seriously on the grey-hound at her side; her skin had the pallor of antique marble while a soft tinge of rose glowed beneath the lustrous eyes; her coal-black hair, drawn loosely back from her forehead, was caught with a ribbon of the same azure blue as her dress. She crossed to the old man's side and stood, looking down at the easel.

"Have you finished the picture yet, Grandfather?" she asked softly.

"Not quite, my dear," he answered, resuming his work.

With languid grace, she sank down upon the bench and motioned to the grey-hound. The canine lay down at her feet. For some time she had looked forward to this moment—the grandfather had prom-

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ised the story of the painting when the work was done.

Usually the child was silent while watching the beautiful work, for fear of disturbing the artistic mood, but, to-day belonged to her—she felt licensed to speak. Her delicate hands clasped around her knee, she leaned forward:

"Grandfather, you remember once, you told me that the stars govern what we call Fate. Is there such a thing as Destiny?"

A question, put so seriously, demanded a serious answer. "People differ in opinion, Pet, but some very great men believe in Destiny. I believe, for all mankind such a thing exists, but many of us answer not when Fate calls—we never grasp our opportunities."

"What did the stars say of me, Grandfather?"

He shook his head.

"You told me they were very bright——"

"And so they were, my dear, but very misty—their promise is beyond me."

A quiet fell upon them. Again he was absorbed; she remained motionless, her wide, dreamy eyes fixed on the horizon, until the old man put aside brushes and pallet. With a half-contented, half-regretful sigh, he drew her close to his side and they gazed in silence at his achievement.

"Grandfather," the child said suddenly, "I know now, that is castle Adrien. How many times I have heard you describe it—so peaceful and grand, far away in another country. You promised to tell me the story—the legend. Why not now? Won't you please, to-day?"

The old man smiled a little sadly perhaps at her childish eagerness.

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"Ah well, if I must, I must," he said; and, seeing that he was about to begin the story she assumed a very attentive attitude.

"I will tell you the story, Pet—a legend it can hardly be called—rather a tradition. It came to me from my father, and, to him, from his father, and so on for generations.

"Once, long ago, Winifred the Great ruled over Auzenburg. He was a good king and was dearly loved; but, as time went on a pretender to the throne appeared, Prince Hadred. Hadred gradually gained many followers, and, after years of rebellion and blood-shed, ascended the throne.

"In many ways, the new ruler proved superior to his predecessor. He had one absorbing weakness—love for Archduke Anthony, a cousin who had assisted him in the conquest—a villain as bold and unscrupulous as ever set foot on Auzen soil. For a long time however, the Emperor was blind to the Archduke's design of becoming 'the power behind the throne.' At last, matters reached a climax—the Auzen nobles demanded Anthony's retirement from court. To appease the Archduke's wrath, Emperor Hadred presented him one of the royal residences, and, at his request, began to cast about for a bride, who would bring rich lands and a handsome dowry.

"Long before this, the Archduke had set his heart on the fair and only daughter of Baron de Cosa but she had been betrothed, much against her will, to the Emperor's only son. The Emperor was at his wits' end when all his proposals had been rejected, he cried in despair, 'My Lord Anthony, do you select your own bride from my country, and she, even the Countess de Cosa, shall be yours for the asking.

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Anthony in no way abashed, boldly made known his choice. Hadred's consternation knew no bounds. In vain, he pleaded for time—the Cosas might prove disinclined to accede to the new demand—but Anthony was inexorable.

"Well the Emperor stood by his promise—the exchange was effected.

"Hitherto, little account had been taken of the women of that land, and neither the Emperor nor the Baron deemed it necessary to consult the inclinations of the maid. The Countess determined to marry neither the Emperor's son nor the Emperor's cousin, but preparations went on.

"The wedding was set for Christmas-day. The day and the hour came, and, with it, startling intelligence—the Countess could not be found; soon, the reason was apparent. While in England, she had met and fallen in love with a British knight, who had followed her to her own country. With the help of a young officer of the Emperor's household, Captain Rodrick von Wieben, the Countess Izora had eloped with her foreign knight."

The old man paused and gazed into space, until at last the child interrupted his reflections:

"What did the Emperor and the Baron do, Grandfather?" she asked softly.

"The Baron followed them to England, Pet, but they fled to America."

"Did they ever go back?" she asked soberly.

"No Pet, they never went back. The Baron never forgave her."

"And she is my ancestress," the child said thoughtfully. "Was she very pretty, Grandfather?"

"Yes, dear, people called her beautiful."

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The old man arose from the bench, and, with care, took the painting, while the little girl reached for the brushes and pallet.

The blue mists had begun to encircle the mountains; fleecy clouds, bearing a tinge of lavender and rose, appeared above the horizon; a frog hopped from its cover, causing the grey-hound to run and bound playfully; the night winds began to stir, making tree-top whisper to tree-top; the sun was sinking as, hand in hand, youth and age went slowly up the walk and entered the house together.

### **II.**

#### **THE EMPEROR.**

Ten years had fled. And in those ten years the face of Europe had changed somewhat.

The Balkan war-scare shattered tranquility; Bulgaria defied the Sublime Porte; Servia threw the gauntlet to Austria and massed her army. Auzenburg, proud, undaunted, faced the Autumn which called for the liquidation of her debts. The Auzen Emperor had developed from boyhood into manhood; the self-will, so bitterly regarded by Van Hellick, had not diminished with the years. The sympathy of the world had been drawn to him on his tragic accession to the throne, and he had remained an object of universal interest.

The first proposed marriage, when he was eighteen, had been hotly rejected. One after another, offers came from many parts of the Continent. The exasperated ministers were unceasing in their efforts to

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bring about a desirable alliance. The Cozhurst offer had never been withdrawn, and the Auzen Chancellor was determined that Louise of Cozhurst should be the Empress-Queen. At regular intervals the lady's name was made conspicuous on the list of eligibles. Sometimes, the Emperor smiled, but, more often, he frowned, and, now and then, sharp words were spoken upon the subject.

An event, which caused the country to awake anew to the necessity of the Emperor's marriage, was the appearance of a suitor for the hand of the Emperor's only sister, the Princess Lena. The ministers did not look on this proposed alliance with favor, as Princess Lena was heir to the throne in the event of the Emperor's leaving no issue. To discuss the advisability of this marriage, the Chancellors met their sovereign one bright, October morning.

The custom of the Emperor, on fair days, was to breakfast early, and, afterward, to receive his two advisers upon the terrace outside the morning-room. "I feel like Castor or Hercules," he was in the habit of saying, "just ready for a tilt with Olympus—or the Chancellors," and his Majesty's hearers would invariably laugh.

Ferdinand had changed little save in stature; he was soldierly and strong.

On that particular morning, as the Emperor was crossing the corridor to the breakfast-room, a golden-haired girl had intercepted him. The golden-haired girl was his sister and her arms clasped almost suffocatingly about his neck, as he was about to cross the threshold.

"Why so early, Liebchen? I had not thought to see you until noon."

"Ach, your Majesty,"—the blue eyes were plead-

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ing—"I felt that I must forestall the Chancellors. Please, please, make me a promise——"

"Do not 'your Majesty' me," he said. I think, I will make you any promise you ask to-day——"

"Ach, Fritz, honor bright?" Her eyes were like stars.

"Have I not said so? Tell me what it is."

"Not—not now." Red surges swept over the girl's face and throat. "I'll tell you, later." Laughing she eluded him and sped gaily down the corridor.

The Emperor smiled. Well, if Lena loved the Prince of Rox-Bordeaux, he would not stand in the way. And, so reflecting, he breakfasted and then joined the Chancellors upon the terrace.

The Chancellors were seated near a small, gilt-legged table on which rested many letters and papers. A few feet away, leaning against a pillar, stood a small, dark man also in civilian dress. He was lending an eager ear to the conversation of the Auzen Chancellor, which was interrupted by the arrival of the Emperor. Von Bertrom and Van Hellick hastily rose and offered their greetings; the dark, young man bowed in a dignified but obsequious manner. He was the Emperor's private secretary; his waxed mustaches and imperial were heartily disliked throughout the city.

Von Bertrom's years sat lightly upon him. If his grey eyes were slightly faded and his step a little less firm, these trifles were overbalanced by his ever assertive buoyancy.

Van Hellick was Auzen to the bone. He was about the Emperor's height (taller than the majority of his race), with thin, long features, deep-set slanting eyes, a firm mouth, and hair, that had once been black as a raven's wing, but was now powdered with

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grey. A stroke of paralysis, the year before, had threatened the termination of a brilliant political career, but—he had rallied and had resumed his hold of national affairs with even greater determination.

The Emperor greeted all as usual, motioned them to chairs, and sitting down beside the table, examined the collection of letters and papers.

The Secretary, preferring a position from which he could scrutinize the faces of his companions, carried his writing material to the base of the column. The pedestal formed an ample seat, and an urn of scarlet flowers threw his face in shadow.

The Emperor spent some time in scanning the foreign news-papers.

"Well," he said at last, tossing aside the T——, "Bulgaria has declared her independence of Turkey. The reigning prince has been crowned king, and refuses to give any indemnity to the Sublime Porte. Austria has determined on the annexation of Bosnis and Herzegovina. The control of the Eastern Roumelian railway seems to be the real question at stake. The treaty of Berlin is broken. The outlook is very grave. And rumor has married me to Dalma of Bohemia. Have we any further news of a loan?"

"No, your Majesty." It was Van Hellick who replied. "Our application to various banking-houses on the Continent has met with no success. The war-scare seems to have sent the foreigners' brains wool-gathering——"

A short discussion of the question followed. "If your Majesty will allow me to make a suggestion," said the Auzen statesman, "perhaps Rox-Bordeaux can aid us in this matter. You have shown favor of the Prince's suit, and, since the Princess' marriage



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with Prince Gustav would be something of a sacrifice——”

“You are thinking of the laws of Rox-Bordeaux,” said Ferdinand.

Van Hellick spread his hands. “If your Majesty give consent to this alliance, Princess Lena must, according to the laws of Rox-Bordeaux, renounce all right to our throne.”

“I am well aware of that. What were you going to say of help from Rox-Bordeaux?”

“Why, I was about to say that since we are to sacrifice the sole heir to the throne——”

“You forget Prince Ludwig.”

“I was about to say that, perhaps Rox-Bordeaux will aid us in lifting the Cozhurst debt in the event of——”

The Emperor again interrupted, “My dear Count, you are sadly misled, if you regard Prince Gustav in the light of a ‘bargain.’ Frankly, he does not own the crown upon his head, and maintains his state and army merely by courtesy of the Confederation. I heartily wish the Princess had placed her affections elsewhere—not that the Prince is unworthy, however. But, since Lena so urgently begs me not to refuse, we must consider her wishes. She thoroughly understands the situation. I talked over the matter with her on receiving Gustav’s first letter.”

The Count subsided for a moment. Here, indeed, was a good opportunity to show how urgent was the need of the Emperor’s own marriage. “Sire, since this matter is settled, I beg you to consider the consequences for the country. With the Princess’ departure from our land, Prince Ludwig of Austria will be the next in line of succession to the throne. I believe, I shall not bring your disapproval upon

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myself by calling him the most profligate, unstable and objectionable man in all Europe—the most unfitted for a throne. Let me entreat you again to give our land a Queen.”

The ripple of the lake and the breeze in the almond trees along the shore, alone, broke the stillness in the interval, which elapsed before the Emperor’s answer. His tone was slow and slightly drawling—altogether as aggravating as he meant it to be.

“Chancellor, my patience is not warranted interminable. For ten years, I have heard the virtues and graces of unknown Princesses extolled, until my sleep is disturbed by the ogre of ‘alliance.’ I tell you, once and for all, that nothing on earth can induce me to wed a woman I do not love. I wish to select my own bride.”

“Your Majesty has never seen the Crown Princess of Cozhurst. From all report, she is accomplished and beautiful.”

“Nor do I wish to see her,” retorted Ferdinand.

“She is said to be ‘democratic,’ and adorable,” persisted Van Hellick, “and seems to take great delight in the sports, of which you are so fond.”

“Too many fill that description,” sighed the Emperor.

“Sire, I fear some person has attempted to poison your feelings in regard to Cozhurst. Surely, King Lois could not give greater evidence of his friendship than in the two offers, he has made. I hear, on good authority, that many princely suitors have met refusal from the King. And that reminds me, we have neither accepted nor declined the second alliance.”

“You mean the triple alliance? Bertrom, what is your opinion concerning this?”

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The Athol Chancellor hesitated. "I confess, I do not know, Sire. My time and mind have been so engrossed with affairs in Athol and in the Duchy that I am a little rusty on 'foreign news.' I attended the afternoon session of the Diet yesterday—it was particularly stormy. I fear, I have formed no opinion as yet."

The triple alliance, to which the Emperor alluded, was a proposed compact between Cozhurst, Auzenburg-Athol and Servia. This was another startling phase of the Balkan trouble. From behind the massive mountains, that enclosed the Slavic Kingdom, hemmed-in by Austria-Hungary on the North and West, by Servia and the province of Bosnis on the South, and by Auzenburg-Athol on the East, had come, in the midst of the turmoil, the offer of a triple alliance. Servia's frantic outburst against Austria had been the dual monarchy's sole excuse for hesitation.

"And you, Count?" the Emperor scarcely needed to question Van Hellick, as this statesman's attitude had aroused some members of the Diet to violent harangues on the previous day.

"I favor the compact, Sire—please hear me out. For many reasons, such a tie with Cozhurst would prove beneficial to us. We are neighbors; the enmity, caused by Turkey is rapidly passing away. Our interests in many ways are identical. This present trouble will affect us all more or less. With Cozhurst and Servia as allies, we would be more secure in case of war—and war is imminent."

The Emperor frowned. "Count—are your views fair to Austria? Granting that the Raven was furthering her interests in lending us our indemnity

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to Turkey—was she not our friend in time of need? Of course, each power must look out for itself. I wish that we might hold aloof from this squabble. But have you reckoned the outcome of a conflict between Austria and Servia? As Servia's ally would we not take up arms against the Raven? In still holding to the compact with Servia, is not Cozhurst openly approving of her war-mad attitude?"

"And Bosnis and Herzegovina?" Van Hellick betrayed some surprise.

"What of them?"

Van Hellick traced the form of a map upon his knee—"Austria, Austria, Austria! Cozhurst will be all but surrounded by Austrian territory—we shall be very nearly so. The Transylvanians will be our only safeguard—our only barrier."

The Emperor's eyes narrowed. "True," he admitted quietly, "and, Count, has the idea never occurred to you that, in entering into the proposed compact, we may be taking sides in the coming conflict? Has it never occurred to your astute mind that a first-class power may be behind Cozhurst?"

"Behind Cozhurst!" The map forgotten, the Auzen Chancellor sat erect. "Why, your Majesty——" he stammered.

"And," the Emperor went on, "this Cozhurst 'triple alliance' scheme will very readily show Austria's enemies. One could hardly expect a country as wild and turbulent as Servia to weigh the consequences of such a move. She considers herself wronged by Austria; that is sufficient. Would a nation, the size of Cozhurst—of Servia be apt to challenge a first-rate power to war, unless some very large and powerful country were behind her?"

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"Surely you do not expect that of Serbia, Sire?" This new phase of the matter was a distinct shock to both statesmen.

"Perhaps not directly behind Serbia, but her ally."

"But who can be behind King Lois?" Van Hellick was mystified.

"Who indeed but the Sublime Porte?"

A startled glance passed between the statesmen.

"I believe, we shall find this true—time will show. 'The Sick Man of the East' will learn, by this 'triple alliance,' the states, from which he can expect aid, and those, from which he has most to fear in case of war with Bulgaria or Austria. The Porte's protests, concerning the two provinces, have been as vehement as Serbia's war between Turkey and Bulgaria or war between Serbia and Austria, will involve the whole of the Balkans."

If this suspicion of Cozhurst proved correct, Auzenburg would be compelled to withdraw from the triple alliance, even if she accepted it now, as her one deadly enemy in Europe was the Ottoman Empire. If the triple alliance were refused, the long-standing, liberal, Cozhurst-marriage offer would undoubtedly be withdrawn. Van Hellick wavered. If King Lois sought to involve Auzenburg in an embarrassing predicament, why was he so anxious for the marriage of Princess Louise and the Emperor?

"We must not lose sight of the fact, Sire, that Princess Louise will, one day, be Queen of Cozhurst."

"Well!" the Emperor lifted his brows.

"And, if your Majesty wed Princess Louise, it is hardly probable that King Lois, however dishonorable and untrustworthy, would seek to bring destruction on one of his own House. If your suspicions

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are correct, Auzenburg would be short lived, indeed, between the Ottoman and the Raven."

"Lois has attempted queerer things than this. Did he not offer virtually to sell out to the Germans for a handful of Teuton troops? Perhaps, I do him wrong at present—let us give him the benefit of the doubt. Mark what I say though; Lois has not forgotten our trouble of twenty years ago. We want no such ally as the Vampire. Cozhurst breaks her promises as she breaks her bread."

"But, Sire," cried Van Hellick, "since you insist that some first-rate power is behind her, why not Austria? In the coup d'état is it not very necessary that Europe's attention be turned from Austria? If not, why then was the same day selected by Austria and Bulgaria for the coup? There are numerous tricks in statecraft, as you know. Perhaps, Servia, herself, has a hand in the game, behind the scenes. Perhaps, this war-talk is another trick of Joseph's."

"Austria has no love for Servia," said the Emperor indifferently. "To return to the subject of matrimony, Count, I have decided to make you a promise."

"And that promise, Sire?" The Count leaned forward eagerly.

"If you will hold your peace for a time, I shall endeavor to wed within the year. Remember, I make no definite promise, but I will seriously consider the matter."

"The pick of all Europe awaits your Majesty——"

The Emperor raised his hand.

"When I choose, I shall give you fair warning. Do not try to force a choice on me at present—too many grave matters claim our attention. Has my proposal not been fair, Bertrom?" Without waiting for a reply, he arose.

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"One thing more, Sire," said Van Hellick springing up. "As you say, war will involve every Balkan state. We can not remain neutral between opposing forces. If we refuse the triple alliance, where do we stand? The first blow, struck by one nation, will be the signal for general hostilities. Austria is sending troops to our borders on the North, and Servia on the South; army movements are going on apace in Turkey and in Bulgaria."

The Emperor shook his head, "If they come to blows, we shall take part. If it were possible to remain neutral, we would be over-run by both Servians and Turks. The Ottoman would become familiar with our defences—or the lack of them—and the land would be devastated by their armies."

I can not see our way clear," said Van Hellick with some agitation. "What has your Majesty decided to do?"

"To remain neutral until war is declared."

"And then——"

"We shall stand or fall with Bulgaria."

"The Secretary sat bolt upright, and, for a fleeting instant, his waxed mustaches twitched convulsively, but, when 'Iron Mask's' gaze fell on him, his glance was lowered discreetly upon his work. Wiebenovitch felt uncomfortable under the sharp, old eyes. As a matter of fact Van Hellick did not see him—he was thinking.

The Emperor relieved the tension by addressing the Secretary.

"Wiebenovitch, has Captain von Wieben sent my new Mecklenburg to the stables?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Then I shall ride, this morning." And, with a slight inclination of the head, he left the trio.

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Van Hellick shrugged expressively, and the Secretary gnawed the end of his pen. Von Bertrom's countenance alone remained unruffled. He stood facing the lake, and something in the line of the lordly, rugged hills attracted him.

To one, familiar with the history of Athol, the alluring point would not have proved difficult to locate. It was the city in Athol where the sovereigns were laid to rest. The last, was Sophia, the wife of Utrich II. of Auzenburg, and the mother of Ferdinand III. and Princess Lena. When the young Queen of Athol had married Utrich II. and had made her residence at the Auzen Court, the man, to whom she intrusted her government, was not her uncle, but her faithful adviser, the young Baron von Bertrom. That a romance had been nipped in the bud, was no court secret. Guided by her ministers Sophia sacrificed her life to the state, and the gallant soldier and diplomat buried his dream. He grew grey in her service; after the departure of the Court, he did not see her until the regal casket, containing her lifeless form, so white and still, was borne to the tomb of her ancestors. He had been a just and kindly regent, and faithful to her interests, always. He was still serving Athol—Athol ruled by her son. In him, Von Bertrom saw again the love of his youth in countenance and, he saw too, the flash of temper and the generous, considerate nature, that had characterized the young Queen. Why the emptiness in his heart? Why, the wish to guide and shield? The Emperor was mature—capable of moulding his own career. The old man dried the moisture upon his nose-glasses, and wondered what had brought it there. When his gaze went forth again, the hills were indistinct. The opening, between two marble



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pillars, gave him a picture of lake and almond trees, late roses and carob and box in a golden mist of sunlight.

At last, the Secretary's voice broke the stillness. "The mail is rather heavy, this morning. Do you wish to dictate any official letters, Count, before I begin my regular work?"

"Thanks, not just now," answered Van Hellick, "I wish to see you, this evening;" and, understanding this as his dismissal, Wiebenovitch departed, reluctantly enough.

Left to themselves, the Chancellors regarded each other for some time, in silence.

"The Diet is surely mad," said Van Hellick.

"—four million crowns for army defences on the Servian border!"

"Ay," said the other, "and, if the Emperor does not wed for the loan—we are only six-million crowns short. The Diet is mad—mad!"

"What are we to do about Cozhurst?" Von Bertrom's mind was sorely troubled.

Van Hellick shrugged again. "I hardly know. King Lois has no underhand designs now, I am certain. Ferdinand is obstinate, as usual. If King Lois's last offer holds good, I shall endeavor to bring the Emperor to reason between now and the first of November."

"Max, I believe him to be right about The Vampire."

"Teufel!" snapped the Count.

Little pretense of further work was made. Von Bertrom complained that his head was aching, and Iron Mask glanced impatiently at his watch. "I have promised to lunch with the Cardinal at one,"

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he said. "Monseigneur returned this morning from Vienna."

"Ah!" said Von Bertrom, "he is a spirit of light in the city. He looks as young to-day as when his Holiness first sent him to us, more than ten years ago."

"True; he shows no signs of age."

"Only his hair—it is too white for a young man."

"Some of us have grey hair early—mine has been so since I first became an adviser of Ferdinand's."

As both stood irresolute for a moment, the grating of the heavy iron gates and the clatter of horses' hoofs upon the far-away court, made Van Hellick scowl. "Ferdinand enjoys too much his sports."

"When one is young——" said von Bertrom musingly, "He enjoys now to the full extent, life and power. There is but one thing lacking."

"And that?" The question came gruffly.

"Love."

There was a short silence; Von Bertrom stood with his chin in his collar, his attention again fixed on the hills. Van Hellick glared from under grizzly brows.

"Without love, the world is but a poor and empty thing," reflectively.

"That does very well for people, who have no one but themselves to consider; but a Royal person——"

"——is not supposed to feel at all," finished von Bertrom without moving.

"Bah!" ejaculated Van Hellick, swinging on his heel.

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### **III.**

#### **AN AMERICAN BEAUTY.**

The Dean of the diplomatic corps closed his home in the Scottish hills and hastened back to London. Wild rumors followed on his heels. Lord Ravenswood was an ex-ambassador to the United States; notwithstanding the hearty welcome, given him by Americans, and an intimation from the Chief Executive, that his return would be more than acceptable, Great Britain needed his valuable service, elsewhere, and the press was now speculating on a South European appointment.

Lady Ravenswood, though of English parentage, had been born and educated in Southern France. She was noted for her wit and intellect, and was accounted the best hostess in the corps. The previous season, she had caused a sensation by introducing to London society an American relative, Marie d'Au-chausen, who instantly won favor with the King and Queen and took London by storm. Wealth and beauty were hers in unstinted measure.

The opening gala performance of the Covent Garden, marked the first public appearance of the Royalties. Prominent members of the upper ten-thousand occupied the boxes.

A stir ran through the audience when Lord Ravenswood's party arrived. The stout old minister and his pretty wife paused to greet a friend at the entrance of their box, letting Marie and her escort precede them.

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Seemingly unconscious of the myriad of opera-glasses, leveled at her, the American girl paused for an instant to speak to the nobleman at her side; as her glance extended to the Royalties, she courtesied, and then sank into a seat near the rail.

The eyes of the man, who carried her fan and bouquet, glittered with pleasure, as he bent over her. The Russian Admiral's uniform became him well—as well indeed as his splendid carriage and debonair manner. Like many nobles of his country, in both the cut of his hair and beard, he imitated the Czar. Because of his handsome person and (supposedly) important mission, Grand-Duke Nacoli was the lion of the hour.

Perhaps the best description of the girl can be given in Nacoli's own words, for like the majority of Russian autocrats, culture and court life had rounded the otherwise rough edges, and given silver-tongued utterance of thought.

"When I first saw her," he said, "my breath was taken by her youth and beauty; Aphrodite could not have been more fair. Her dainty form and flower-like face go to the heart like wine."

In the Royal box, the King leaned over to speak to one of the visiting princesses.

"Did your Highness not say you are acquainted with the American Beauty?"

The red-haired young woman in green, who had been whispering under cover of her fan to the officer behind her chair, turned a flushed, bewitching face toward the King. "Mademoiselle—ach! you mean the Ambassador's cousin? Quite by accident, we met, a month ago, in Scotland. I adore her. Do you not think she is beautiful? Ah, those eyes! that face! I'd give half my existence to own that

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ivory complexion. We Southerners are so very dark."

The King smiled genially.

"I wish, she were with us," the Princess rattled on, "I am as much infatuated as is your London."

"So be it," said the King, motioning to an attendant. The Princess interposed.

"But her escort——"

"Um—eh, that Russian?"

"May we not have him, too? He is very handsome——" with a sparkle of fun.

"I suppose so—if your Highness wishes."

"Ah, you are so kind! You know that reminds me of an incident, sometime ago—when I was a care-free, romping girl, with my hair in two severe, long plaits—I became very much attached to a singer who was accompanied every-where by his dogs. The King can not bear the sight of the animals and they are strictly forbidden within the Palace grounds. One day, I sent for the artist to entertain some friends and I received this reply: 'Your most favored Highness, I can not sing without my dogs.' So the dogs had to be admitted, too. Did you say, the young man is a Russian?"

At that moment, the attendant returned, ushering in the favored couple. The girl made a picture in the red-curtained arch-way, with her filmy dress and dusky, jeweled-crowned hair.

The King and Queen welcomed both graciously, and her Majesty said, smilingly, as she retained the girl's hand:

"This is my new protégé. I have appointed myself god-mother to the American debutantes, you know."

With characteristic impulse, the young woman in green insisted that the American should be at her

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side. "I am going to monopolize your whole time," she announced gaily. "I can not forget that dreadful day in Dunmoreland when you came to my rescue. You were a darling—Did I tell your Majesty about it?" She interrupted her reminiscences, conscious that she was neglecting the King. Without giving time for reply, she plunged into a witty account of a traveling predicament, and, soon, had the attention of the circle. Her elasticity and gaiety were infectious; she kept her companions laughing and exclaiming.

Rumor said that to break an undesirable attachment, the Princess had been sent abroad, if so, she lost no sleep over it. In every turn of her head, every glance of the fathomless eyes, she betrayed the intensity of a Southern nature. She was reputedly democratic, and indulged, to an amazing degree, in sports (amazing to her own country-women) but, withal, she was generally beloved and admired.

She felt that the accident, which had thrown her on the American's beneficence, had brought them close to each other, and, in her, there welled an almost childish fancy for the foreigner—childish, because of its intensity on short acquaintance. She did not realize that, in herself, there was a similar fascination; the two girls were drawn together by some strange force which neither thought either to question or to analyze.

The officer, sunk into the shadow of the arch, did not hear the girl's ceaseless chatter. Of the two heads, bent forward, the one of molten gold held his admiring glance. "Why," he asked himself, is she not the American—free to follow the dictates of her heart? Then, I would stoop from my exalted position and elevate her to it. As it is, she is a star

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—not so very far above and still beyond me. I am selfish to wish ruinous complications, about her throne in this crisis and yet—ach! I would she were the American that I might ask the diplomat for her hand and, presto! she is mine.”

Arch-Duke Michael could not guess that, in the mind of his dark-bearded vis-à-vis, a similar thought was wrangling in regard to the American beauty. Nacoli was telling himself that the assertion of rights by the young people of the States was demoralizing. His two refusals from the debutante were fresh in his mind. “But, I asked my Lord, your kinsman, for you, and my suit is approved,” he had remonstrated. (The Ambassador had not discouraged the Prince.)

Marie had looked up at him and said naively, “But we Americans do not marry whom our kinsmen choose, your Highness.”

Straightening Nacoli solicited the Ambassador to plead his cause, but Lord Ravenswood spread his hands with an air of resignation.

“You are her guardian,” Nacoli had said impatiently.

“Ah, but your Highness forgets she is American,” reminded the Statesman. And the Grand-Duke promptly wished she were of the Continent where guardians are law.

Nacoli was not wholly mercenary in his pursuit of a wife, but wealth played no mean part in his quest. Underlying his official mission, was another, more important to him—the position at St. Petersburg, held so long by him, was coveted by wealthier autocrats, and was about to be taken from him. Money was necessary; his castles and estates were

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heavily mortgaged, so that gold was no longer forthcoming from that quarter. He turned to matrimony for help. Of course, he could not wed for wealth alone; his help-meet must shine brightly among the court women of his land, and many accomplishments were desirable.

"His wife must be witty and rapid of tongue,  
As lovely as Venus, deliciously young."

Where this paragon was to be found, he had no idea. One afternoon, while speeding in S—shire, he had collided with a smart looking trap in which were two attractive women. Weeks later, he had recovered to find himself the guest of a stately mansion in the Highlands; his host was a stout old man, who wore one of those English abominations, a monocle. One of the ladies was his wife, the other a cousin.

Nacoli lost both heart and head to the cousin, and the intelligence, that his charmer was the possessor of an enormous fortune was additionally gratifying. That an American girl could persist in refusing a grand-ducal coronet was beyond his ken.

Nacoli was aware that Arch-Duke Michael had followed the Princess to London. (Under-current diplomats have very alert eyes and ears.)

Beneath the austere nose of her chaperon, the Princess was wooed by her Austrian lover. Baroness von Artem, no doubt, complacently pictured the gratitude of her sovereign for so skillfully manipulating this scheme of wrenching the Princess from an undesirable alliance. And Cupid—little rogue—was laughing in his turn at this wily old Ambassador, laughing at the majesty of thrones.

The scene recounted was the beginning of a



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staunch friendship between the Princess and the American girl, and of some rather startling adventures, the culmination of which—we shall see.

### **IV.**

#### **COZHURST.**

The ebony hands of the clock upon the mantel in Lady Ravenswood's boudoir, had long passed the hour of midnight. The dense fog and chill of the day had necessitated a fire, and the cozy room glowed in the rosy light from the hearth, upon which a tea-kettle sang drowsily.

Madame, herself, lounged in a leather rocker, while her maid disposed of jewels and gown, worn at a ball. The black negligée set off her youthful figure, and her blue eyes seemed to gather sparkles from the cup of amber liquid in her hand. She was listening for a footstep in the hall.

"Peste! Marie is long in coming to-night," she remarked more to herself than to the maid. They dine late at the Palace.

"Ah, I hear her voice—and the Duke's and Aunt Dorothy's. Brew more tea, Matilde, then you may retire; Falesse will come to unrobe them. The door closes—there is the auto, now the Duke is gone."

The elderly lady, whom Madame termed Aunt Dorothy, sought her own room immediately, but, an instant later the girl entered. The maid relieved her of wraps and veils, and then retreated noiselessly. Marie's happy face and radiant smile told plainly enough that the evening had been pleasant. She put

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the flowers, she carried, upon the table, and refusing Madame's offer to ring for Falesse, sat down opposite. Lady Ravenswood's quick eyes ran over every detail of her toilette, from the dainty white-slippered feet to the silver band upon her hair.

"You are a jewel," she breathed at last. "Ah, Marie, I wonder I have not made you vain a thousand times over. Do not tell me that you failed to win their hearts to-night."

"I am not going to Helene," she answered laughingly. "I know you wish to hear all about it. Well, there were old diplomats, and the Royalties, and lovely women—a very few of their Majesties' favorites. The Queen had me as her partner at bridge, and then Louise of Cozhurst. I love her little German Highness; she is so different from what any one could have expected."

"They have shown you marked favor, *ma chere*," said Madame fondly. I hope the Baron may be sent to Auzenburg. If he should be, we may see her marriage. A Royal wedding—strange as it may appear to you—is something I have never seen. The press is gossiping about a Bohemian alliance for Emperor Ferdinand, I notice. I wish they would hasten and settle it; I believe the peace of the Balkans hangs upon his speedy marriage."

Madame, gazing at the fire, did not see that the girl had lost color.

"I did not notice the Times—tell me what it says," she questioned in a rather strained voice.

Lady Ravenswood shrugged expressively. "Nothing as usual—of real importance. Ah, yes—let me see—it did say the Emperor had promised at last to wed."

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Marie drew her breath sharply. "So he will wed? And who is to be his Empress?"

"No one, as yet. He has merely promised to consider seriously the Ministers' entreaties."

"Do you know, H  len  ," she said abruptly, "Louise and King Lois are at daggers' points over this proposed Auzen alliance, she tells me. King Lois swears, she shall wed as he choosed, and the Princess is equally determined never to be traded off for a few thousands. She insists, the offer made by the Auzen ministers is no better than a paltry bargain—a perfect little rebel."

She is in love with that Austrian Arch-Duke," said Madame quickly.

Marie gave her a quick look. "How did you know?"

"I have eyes. It is a wonder, he dared to follow her here in the face of such strong opposition."

"Nacoli adores you, Marie," went on Madame gravely, "but I think, your course with him is best. He is very fine and handsome, but, with all my enquiries, I have failed to learn anything definite about him—save that he is a cousin of the Czar."

"It is not that Helene," the girl said quickly. "If I cared for him, I suppose things would be different, but I do not, and oh! sometimes I get so dreadfully tired. I wish I could run off and be just any little maid for a while. How many admirers would I have? I am sure I could count them on my fingers. I wonder if Nacoli would be among them?" She broke off with a smile, "Oh, I am not bitter, dear, but had it not been for your kindly warning, I should never have dreamed that some suitors might care only for—for my gold," her voice dropped to a whisper.

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Madame held up her hands in horror. "Marie, I merely meant that you should exercise prudence in your choice. I did not say that you are not worth double, aye triple, the fortune, but that there are those who would win you for that alone, and I want none of this kind for you. I wish to see you gloriously, supremely happy. You are all the world to me."

Marie rested her chin in her hand; the color had not returned to her cheek. After a moment, Madame went on.

"I have been thinking a great deal lately, and you know, *ma chere*, that the appointment can not be far off. When it comes, it will mean rush, pack, vanish in a night. I have been wondering if you would like to remain in London, this season?"

"And be away from you?"

"Not entirely. I shall run back, once or twice, no doubt. Aunt Dorothy insists that she is thoroughly worn out with foreign countries, and Harold would be near you. I mention this because I wish you to remain where you are happiest. I can suit my plans to yours."

Marie sat erect. "And I haven't the remotest idea of being left behind," she announced, "I should be most unhappy."

"*Très bien*, then, all shall be as you say." Madame tried to withhold the rush of joy from her tones. She had hesitated to broach this subject, as it would mean much sacrifice for her. "All that remains to be done is to make ourselves ready to depart. You say the Princess returns to Cozhurst, to-morrow?"

"So she has decided, and she wants me to visit her before we settle down for the season. Helene, I've half a mind to accept her invitation."

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Madame's face was inscrutable.

"You know," she continued, "Harold told me, this evening, that he had succeeded in buying castle Adrien from the Auzen government, and he is going there immediately to begin improvements on the castle. I thought if Aunt Dorothy did not mind, she and I would run over there, and visit her Highness on the way. Then, if you are sent to Auzenburg, we can join you. Louise urges me to set an early date for my visit. What do you think of the plan?"

"The very thing—if you must go so soon." Madame was thoughtful for a time. It seemed to her that she must unburden her mind. At last she said: "Marie, is there no one in all London whom you will miss?"

"Dear, dear Helene," the girl cried smiling, "there is not one—in the way you mean. There is Harold, of course, and many new friends, but my heart will not be left in London."

Madame drew her chair closer, and put her hand over the girl's. "I did not consider Hal, though he would have it so, if he were consulted. "Not one?"

"Not one," resolutely.

Madame looked perplexed. At one time, she had thought Nacoli was to be "Prince Charming," but had long since realized her error.

"I give it up," she breathed, "twenty-two—and he has not come yet. Why, ma belle, I was scarcely out of the convent, young—so young. But when your Prince comes, will you not tell me? I want to help you in every way, I can; my one prayer is that he may not be unworthy. It seems disloyal, I suppose, to speak of that now, but my romance was snatched away in its bud. I did not love the Baron, Dear, but what were my protests? Ah, well! it must be

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better so. He was beneath me in station. I should not now be the wife of a great statesman, had I married him, and I have many things to be thankful for. But, when your Prince appears, you must tell me. Is it not so?" Her eyes were wells of tenderness. Marie was hers to shower gifts upon, and the greatest of these gifts, a wonderful love.

Marie rose and stood, looking down at the impassioned face, with a look in her own face, which gave Madame a premonition. Perhaps Lady Ravenswood was not altogether surprised.

"Helene," the girl began hesitatingly, "I do not know what to say—I can not make you understand. The Prince—my Prince, has come. I have tried to shut him out of my thoughts, but it seems useless; in time, I may succeed—I do not know. I have let myself be won by a picture—a fancy. Yet I do not love him—not, not quite, though I could."

"I do not understand, *ma chere*? Who is he? Come, tell me all about him. Where have you met him, and when?"

"Your questions are hard to answer. I have never met him—never seen him, and yet I know each line of his face by heart. As for thinking of him, I should not. Doubtless, I shall never meet him and—small matter if I should."

"And why?" interrupted Madame, "Is he so great—so cold toward women? I can not decipher your puzzle. You know his face, and yet you have never seen him. Tell me, who is he?"

In a flash, the confiding mood was gone, and red-cheeked, almost shy, Marie turned away. Oh, Helene, I am very silly! Forget this incident, and let us talk of other things."

But Madame, once aroused, was not to be put

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aside. She tried to corner the girl with questions, but only to be skillfully evaded. At last, a light dawned in her eyes. "I know. I believe I know," she murmured. "If I guess aright, will you tell me? Is it—Emperor Ferdinand?"

With a little cry, the girl put her hand to her throat. The miniature, which she usually wore, was missing.

"I found the picture yesterday," explained Madame. "When I picked up the case, I noticed the clasp was loose and opened it. You once had Harold's picture—you painted the other? It is splendid!"

Marie was like a child, caught in some mischief, as she related the circumstances of the change in the locket—she often painted for her own amusement, and had done the clever miniature, several years before. However, no one had been allowed to see it, and she could not explain the impulse which prompted the change.

"I never dreamed, you would see it," she finished. "Helene! Helene! What must you think of me? I am ashamed, ashamed!"

Madame sprang up and drew her close. "Ashamed—to love him! Why Marie who would not love him? And ma chere, I feared he was some one impossible. I am glad—glad!"

Marie looked up. "How can you say that? Is it not all dreadfully impossible? But we must not be so serious. You know, I did not say 'I love him,' only that I could."

"Why not, Marie? He would not be the first to wed an American girl."

"But an Emperor——"

"Fie, Sweet, Emperors live and love much the

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same as the rest of us. From all accounts, their hearts often over rule their heads. Who knows if he should meet you—visit your German Princess, and then we shall see. Now to bed, and may Fate smile on you—and him.”

It seemed to the girl that Fate had smiled—in the guise of Louise of Cozhurst. She had never dreamed to see the Princess whom every one said he was to wed; much less, to be styled her friend—yet all this had come to pass. She loved Louise and Louise loved her, as only loyal friends can love. The thing, that would have made a gulf between two less true, bound them in closer unity; an understanding existed which required no words. Vaguely, Louise guessed that the man to whom she would be bound (unless some kindly play of Destiny intervened) was the ideal of her new found friend; and Marie, with real sympathy, had listened to the Royal girl's tale of a mad, almost hopeless love bestowed on one beneath her in rank. At times, Marie wondered that she was so free from jealousy, for, all told, even till Madame's vaulting fancy, no thought of other than the seemingly inevitable Cozhurst-Auzen alliance had entered her mind. And after this she called Madame “a dear, doting goose,” and cast the futile dream aside—for was he not an Emperor, and she, for all her wealth and noble blood was a plebeian, or considered so, by the custom-bound autocracy of Europe. Louise had swept away these barriers with one leap of her impetuous affection. She called the girl her “American Princess,” and placed her warm, dark fingers over Marie's lips when she would have said her nay.

King Lois, for some unaccountable reason, had curtailed his niece's sojourn in England, and in com-



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pliance with his mandate, the Princess departed on the following day, armed with Marie's promise closely to follow her return. Arch-Duke Michael also left hurriedly for Vienna, where his regiment made ready to depart for the frontier. The war cloud grew daily; and even in remote London a shadow sat upon the troubled brow of the corps.

On the same evening of the Princess' departure, the young Englishman mentioned between Marie and Madame put in an appearance at the Baron's residence. He was a tall, clean-cut young man with a shock of sun-browned hair and cherubic expression; his guileless countenance belying his keen business sense. The firm of Covell and Huntington, of which he was junior partner, was of considerable importance in London. Mr. Covell was declining in health, and matters of moment were often intrusted to Harold. The firm were Marie's bankers and attorneys, and it was on business that the young man presented himself. By skillful manipulating, he had succeeded in buying castle Adrien, which the girl had so long coveted, and now he wished instructions from her upon the improvements to be made. They had previously agreed that she should superintend the remodeling, after he made the domain habitable.

Huntington found his cousin in the library and very much interested in reports from her recently opened Mexican mines. He admired her for this. "So few girls" thought he "would ever ask about their interests as long as the income is forth-coming."

She sprang up as he entered, the papers scattered at her feet.

"Hal, you have been doing splendidly of late, but really I am frightened at the thought of having so dreadfully much."

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"That sensation is foreign to most people, I dare say," he retorted smiling.

She regarded him seriously for a moment. "I can't rest content like so many of the social set here without an idea beyond the next court, and the next. Just think of having what I own and never doing anything with it—I mean anything really worth while. I wish I could do some good for others. I think that after all the poor are often happiest."

"You have done good for others, Miss Samaritaine. Look at De Rambrent. Did you not make it possible for her to become the famous singer she is—even when you were a child? And, besides," he added, "when you are rich, you can do good in any way you wish, and when you are poor you can't, so there."

They fell to discussing the new estate, and he told her that the castle was stripped of many of its treasures such as famous tapestries and paintings.

"One painting, they say, is especially beautiful—the portrait of a woman. It was sold two years ago to defray the expenses incurred in some way."

"That is strange," said Marie, "as the castle is in the hands of the State."

"That is the point," answered Harold. "The Emperor has kept the estate from the hands of foreigners, and the painting is in his possession. We have already offered a lot of good English coin for it, but the Emperor refuses."

"Do you know whether it is a family portrait?"

"I have learned nothing further. Perhaps, after you join me, we may be able to get it."

At this stage in the conversation a slight rustling made them turn.

"You, Auntie!" Marie exclaimed as a little silver-

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haired old lady sat erect on the divan, "I had quite forgotten you were here."

Miss Huntington adjusted her glasses and stifled a yawn with a dainty handkerchief. "Your ceaseless chatter about mines must have made me drowsy. Marie, can't you compel Harold to drown business for a while? I wonder you put up with it as you do."

"I like it, Auntie," the girl answered frankly, "it makes one feel she knows a little besides clothes and jewels and court-life—oh, I've finished, Dear, do not look so desperate. She laughed as Miss Dorothy raised her eyes toward the ceiling.

\* \* \* \* \*

The latter part of the same week, Marie, Miss Dorothy, the maid, and the boxes were deposited in the quaint old city of Cozhurst and the ladies escorted to the Royal Palace with truly Royal splendor.

### V.

#### A CHANGE OF TITLES.

While armies marched and fortifications were strengthened under cover of the night, the Cozhurst capital radiated with light and gaiety. Music floated from the Palace—irresistible, alluring. Great coaches rumbled up the hill and into the illuminated grounds. Statesmen, diplomats, courtiers, the fairest women in all the land, answered the monarch's summons. It appeared that he was celebrating some victory to come.

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The splendid ball-room was festooned with satins in the national colors; flowers were everywhere in profusion. A gilded chair, on a little dais, was reserved for the King when he grew weary; to the right, of this, stood his aides and suite; to the left, Louise with her ladies in waiting, and, beside Louise, the American girl and her aunt.

To those who have looked upon King Lois, it will seem that no word picture can do that weakened, grim old figure justice. His hawk-like eyes, peering from under grizzly brows, were alive with the pride of his court; the long, blunt nose and scarred cheek gave evidence of strength in the lip and lower jaw, which were obscured by mustaches and beard, the latter clipped shovel-shaped; his ears were particularly noticeable, being almost transparent and very prominent; and his forehead, from which the white hair was carelessly tossed back, bespoke a powerful mind. This was the monarch, whom all believed held the peace of Europe in the hollow of his hand.

When Louise had informed the King of her friend's approaching visit, he had submitted with better grace than could have been expected. He had no desire to antagonize his niece; at present, she was necessary to the furthering of his schemes. Louise, aroused, was not the laughing, happy-hearted Princess, whom her intimates adored. In the end, the King knew there would be a contest of wit and might between them—but, until the climax, he wished—above all things—a truce. Hot words had passed between them upon the subject of the Auzen alliance since the Princess' return from England.

The King was pleased that this foreign girl had caught her fancy. Mademoiselle d'Auchausen might exert great influence over the strong-willed Teuton

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Princess, whose self-assertiveness had wrought havoc for the school-room in governess' days, and, for him in later years. So speculating, he was very gracious to his guests. He hardly needed an extra incentive, for Marie's beauty had moved him deeply. She was entertaining, bewitching; knowing Louise's infatuation, the thought occurred to him that he could have no better ally in time of need. He had never beheld a more graceful dancer; he had never heard a sweeter voice. Unconsciously, he tucked away his gruff demeanor, and perforce, fell under the spell of her loveliness. He, who had buried gentleness with his youth, was gentleness personified toward her. The Vampire had left his gloomy lair and was basking in the sunshine.

"Hard hit," smiled a courtier to his neighbor. "A stunner in that white and gold, by the Book! Wonder if she is rich?"

"As Croesus, they say."

The aged monarch's manifest approval of the foreign ladies elicited many such remarks from the court.

"What a wealth of diamonds," sighed the court-women.

Amid such Royal splendor, Marie could not help thinking how in a week's time she would dwell near another court, many of whose personages she knew by name and fame, if not by actual sight. Aye, the court was gaier than this, 'twas said; the monarch was young and good to look upon. It was out of the order of things that he should remain unwed—if not Louise, another would some day be his Queen.

For an instant, an almost uncontrollable desire to seek that metropolis—when the work on castle Adrien was underway—assailed her. If Lady Ravens-

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wood were sent elsewhere, Marie would have little difficulty in obtaining presentation through the English Ambassador. Yet to meet him, as one among scores of foreigners, seemed a consummation little to be desired. Perchance, she would receive a glance and a few courteous words. Would he ever think of her again? Surely, some wireless message would whisper that they had met before—in dreams. She could almost fancy Fate was urging her to hasten to his land. Why was the voice so insistent?

These leaves from Marie's diary, faithfully kept, reveal her impression of place and people as well as of events:

Every moment since our arrival has been pleasant. Louise is a splendid hostess—an incomparable companion. She is skilled in every way—small wonder that the people adore her. Yet, she is unhappy and my heart goes out to her. Oh, do not smile, little book; I know of what you are thinking, but really I am unselfish. Listen and I will prove 'tis so. This is a secret.

The Auzen Envoy has been received this evening by King Lois. They were closeted together for an hour—he came to re-open the alliance negotiations under different conditions.

I found Louise crying—all alone—an hour since, and she told me all about it.

How wonderful that she should have taken me into her confidence! Could I be a traitor? No! a thousand times over. No one shall cast a shadow upon our friendship—not even *he*.

Louise scorns her uncle's threats; she spurns the Auzen alliance. She turned to me for consolation. What was I to do? I sat upon the arm of her chair

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and tried to reason with her. Did I not picture Auzenburg a fairy kingdom? Did I not make the Emperor a god? I was a better ambassador than the real one, without doubt. And what did she say?

When I had subsided for want of breath, she drew me down and kissed me, murmuring "You little traitor!"

"I am not guilty of that charge," I said. "Louise, (she requested me to call her so) I am your ally always."

"Traitor to your own heart," she corrected, "you loyal little darling! But I shall never be the Empress of the Auzens—Praise him if you will, Marie, but remember, my decision is unalterable. I am promised to Michael, and Michael's I shall always be."

Yet, little book, the King says that she shall wed the Emperor.

I had a curious dream last night. I seldom dream, perhaps that is the reason this impressed me so. I seemed to be standing upon a mountain's lofty summit; below me, I could see the Danube, and beyond, the Auzen valley. A man, stood on the far bank of the river, shading his eyes with his hand. He looked expectant, anxious. At last, the hand fell to his side with a despairing movement, and I saw the Emperor's face. An instant later, a blue mist obscured the vale.

To-night, I am weary; next time, I shall tell you more. Just one week in this quaint old city—just one week with Louise. I wonder shall we ever meet again! Something whispers "yes." When and where, only time will show.

One thing more, and then I must say good-night. King Lois' kindness must not be over-looked. What he thinks of Aunt Dolly, I do not know, but he is

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evidently pleased with me. They say, he never dances. How many times was he my partner to-night? I confess, I am ashamed to say. It shall not be so another time. There is no need for him to monopolize me. I should feel flattered. I do. He paid me a compliment to-night, and then laughed at his own abruptness, saying he had forgotten how to do such things. Queer odd King! 'Tis said his hand is iron and his wit is steel. Well! well! I must remember, he has never seen an American before.

So Marie recounted this and that incident, little suspecting many of them would make history.

The two girls made the most of their time together. All entertainments were formal, but frequent canters into the hills and the hour of retiring were given over to unrestrained companionship.

On the evening of the fourth day the two rode out to Dorsbadd, a hamlet south of the capital, whither the court often repaired to enjoy the hunting season.

The Royal lodge was a rambling red-brick structure, half hidden by a grove of fir trees. The place was always open to visitors, and was the pride of the King.

Louise and Marie had great fun, exploring the grottoes and miniature lakes, dining on the terrace in the rear of the Schloss and, tired but happy, discussed their plans for the following day.

"This is a dear old place, is it not?" Louise asked suddenly, her gaze wandering over familiar objects with loving tenderness.

"Indeed, it is," Marie answered readily. "I like it, because it is so picturesque. Where you expect to see autumn tints and brilliant colors in the landscape,



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you find firs—black firs—with their queer, silvery barks, Italian skies, and emerald lakes——”

Said Louise suddenly, “Madame told me, you are a direct descendant of the Auzen de Cosas.”

“That is true.”

“Also that the estate and title are yours by right.”

“They should have been. My ancestress eloped with an Englishman.”

“But there were no other children?”

“None.”

Take up your residence there, Marie, and proclaim yourself an Auzen.”

“Louise . . . you and Madame must be in league—why?”

Color sprang to Louise’s cheek and she laughed evasively.

“Why? Honor bright, I do not know—except that I want to see you an Auzen subject.”

“Lou!”

“If I say more than that, I shall make you angry. Do not fight against Fate.”

“I don’t understand.”

Louise leaned forward, her strong gauntleted fingers closed around those of her friend.

“I must speak, Marie. You will not misunderstand, for I love you. Strange things happen in this old world. Some people believe in Fate; others scorn it—I, for one, am a Fatalist. I was destined to shatter my uncle’s cherished scheme; and you Marie——”

“And I——”

“You and Emperor Ferdinand are meant for each other.”

That night, a rather queer conversation occurred

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in the palace between King Lois and Louise. They were in the great library. The King, with one foot swathed in bandages and in one of his worst humors, was listening in silence to his niece, who stood leaning against the marble mantel.

"I tell you, I will do no such thing," she stoutly affirmed. "I will never give in. What!" she turned upon him, her eyes flaming, "to be sold like a paltry sack of grain? A Cozhurst Princess—never! Ach, you would sell me to a man whom I have never seen for a boundary city. That frail, imbecile book-worm of Auzenburg—what can you think of a man who is willing to share his throne with a woman he has never seen till the wedding day?" She laughed a little wildly. "Come, Uncle, if you are bent on ridding yourself of me, at least find a husband who can be master."

"Master, hey," purred King Lois, rubbing his hands. "Frail, imbecile book-worm! Aye, Ferdinand will be master; he will have none of these vixenish outbursts. Think you, girl, that the man, who beards the Iron Chancellor, will put up with your freaks? No, I tell you! Come to your senses before it is too late, and consent with a good grace——"

"Never!"

"Then you need not grumble at the consequences. Monday the wedding arrangements shall be begun. Cozhurst is not England."

"Oh, if it only were!" her color deepened and she spoke softly. How I envy those glorious English girls—and Marie."

The old King sat erect, "Mademoiselle de Auchausen—Louise, if you were more like her—amiable, responsive, vivacious——"

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Louise's eyes widened with wonder. When had she ever heard such words of commendation from the King—crabbed and hardened.

"I am so glad you admire her, Uncle," she murmured.

"Every one admires her," he went on placidly. "She is the kind that men wreck empires for. A crown would not become her ill."

"Indeed it would not," assented Louise, glad of a change of subject, "she will make a brilliant match—some day."

"Do you think she is betrothed to the Russian Prince of whom you speak so often?"

"Nacoli? No, though he is madly infatuated with her. A splendid man, too; he is tall, muscular and soldierly—the highest type of Russian culture and refinement."

The King was impatient to broach the subject which had caused him a restless day; versed though he was in state-craft, he realized his utter helplessness in matters pertaining to the heart, and, though he secretly feared ridicule, he earnestly desired help. Therefore, he had blindly sought the one in all his kingdom from whom he could expect the least sympathy.

"When did you first meet her?"

"In Scotland, little more than a month ago. I found myself in a rather awkward predicament with some horrid railroad officials. I was separated from the Ambassador's party, and, really, don't know what I should have done, but for the timely aid of Marie and her cousin, Monsieur Huntington."

"She is going to Auzenburg from here?"

"Yes, to Schloss Adrien."

"You seem to be very fond of her."

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"Indeed, I love her dearly. I shall miss her dreadfully when she leaves us.

"Ach," said the King; this was the opening he wanted. "I have been thinking very seriously to-day and it seems to me that I have never met a more splendid girl in every way. Of course, tradition would be trampled upon, but there have been so many international marriages of late, that one step higher would cause little comment. A Queen would most certainly be a desirable personage at court; my summers would be more pleasant, and the capital would not lack a mistress—as has been the case so often in the past. Mademoiselle d'Auchausen has traveled; she is familiar with our language and the customs of our people. What do you think she would say to becoming your aunt."

"Uncle Lois!" for a moment, Louise stared at him and then went off into peal after peal of ringing laughter.

For some time with a frown the King regarded the convulsed figure, "I fail to see what is so funny," he snapped.

Louise shrieked again. Grimly, he waited, until she stopped from sheer exhaustion.

"Oh—h!" she gasped, not heeding his face which had become red with fury, "It does seem so perfectly—ludicrous."

"What pray?"

"You wanting to—to——" the attack threatened again and the Princess hid her face against the mantel.

The King got to his feet in a towering rage and seizing the girl by the arm shook her roughly, thereby somewhat sobering her.

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"Oh—h!" she said again, "I know, I have behaved awfully, but—but—have you asked her, Uncle?"

"No, I have not," gruffly. "What do you think, she would say if I should ask her?"

"I—I am sure I do not know," stammered Louise.

Grumbling, he returned to the large arm-chair; Louise faced him now, her hands clasped behind her; once or twice, her lips twitched suspiciously, but, otherwise, she was quite calm.

The King felt hostility in the air, and the more he thought of his niece's unseemly behavior, the angrier he became. "I can not see why you should object," he began peevishly, "I am sure Mademoiselle d'Auzausen would make an agreeable companion for you until you wed the Emperor. While it is true, you would not be the all-important personage you are at present, you would still be the Crown Princess. The mention of the Emperor was a mistake, as the King soon perceived. Louise drew herself up rigidly and her face became hard and repellent.

"Really I have no objections to offer, but I think some one else has her heart."

"Any rational girl would accept such an offer as mine and gladly forget others less favorable."

"Perhaps your rival is as great or greater than you," with the faintest suspicion of a sneer.

"Greater than I," he repeated slowly. "Surely the girl is not such a fool. No king would think of offering her anything more than a morganatic marriage—I intend to offer her my throne, you understand, my throne. Well, the Chancellor has asked for a moment, girl, so go and think over what I have said—"

"I shall never think otherwise about—"

"Think or not, you shall obey me!" He brought

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his fist down upon the stand beside him with such force that the rose-jar shattered and flew in tiny fragments to the floor. "All the marriage contract lacks is the Emperor's seal; now go."

With rebellion in her heart, Louise flew to her own apartments.

Dear, sweet, wayward, innocent Princess; her heart was nigh to breaking. She was determined never to give her consent to the Auzen alliance, and, rather than break her resolution, she would have faced death calmly. How to out-wit King Lois was her predominating thought, day and night. She did not know that opposition on the Emperor's side was as strong as her own.

That night, an idea came to her—a very daring idea. Her first impulse was to confide in Marie, but, after consideration, she decided to wait until the following day. King Lois would undoubtedly seize on the first opportunity of asking Marie to be his wife, and Louise felt her plan must rest until she knew the girl's answer.

Shortly before dark, Ruperta, the Princess' favorite lady-in-waiting, had slipped out on the terrace where she was met by Captain Trephof. The letter in her hand bore the Princess' well-known writing. Many a glance, the maid had stolen at these missives, and, many a time, had conjured up the image of the addressee. Well she knew her peril, if caught by King Lois, but, in her way, she was as staunch a soldier as the dashing officer to whom she intrusted the letters. Where Love leads, the nerve is steady and both man and maid were devoted to the Royal girl, some day to be their queen.

"The letter is bearing important news to-night."

"As usual."

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"You will think so when you know. Her Highness is going to Auzenburg.

"Auzenburg!" cried Trepshof.

Rupert looked wise but would not explain, only saying that he would be intrusted with the secret in due time.

The next morning, in riding-habit, Marie sauntered out on the terrace to await Louise. The day was especially dreamy; hill and vale were clad in hazy blue rendering the sky-line soft and indistinct. Gentle air from the surrounding hills, brought the odor of fir and dew-wet grasses. Marie sought a sequestered nook where she could observe without being observed, and, resting her riding-crop across her knees, clasped her ungloved hands about them. Her dainty gauntlets had fallen unnoticed at her feet.

Balconies and terraces were apparently deserted, but the King, aware that Louise was tardy, and consumed with one idea, also sauntered out, and came upon the girl in her quiet retreat. For some moments, he regarded her averted figure, and then gently spoke her name.

Marie, startled out of her reverie, stammered a greeting. "I was surprised at seeing you so early. How is your gout this fine morning?"

He ignored the inquiry concerning his health. "One must follow where Beauty leads, Mademoiselle. Even so soon, you have set more than one fashion," then, thinking this a trifle gruff, he added, "If you were with us long I should become a courtier again. But I have seen so much more of warfare than of ladies' smiles, I am almost at a loss in the art of compliments. Sincerity seems roughness from me, I know. I never fail to let it be known when any

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thing displeases me, and, when I am pleased—well, this outspokenness has become a habit.”

Marie laughed brightly, “I adore outspokenness. Do you know,” she added with a pretty archness, you are so different from—my expectations. Now I hope I have not offended you.”

The King’s expression was a puzzle. “They hardly paint me an angel in Britain, aye?” Then abruptly changing the subject—“What do you think of Cozhurst for a fortress? The country has not always been its present size.”

“I think, it is a very great fortress. In fact, if I were ruler and at war with any nation, I should feel secure in defying the world—here.”

“I have had my dreams of conquest,” he said, waving his arm toward the hills, “but, after all, what would it amount to. If a Queen shared my throne—why then I should have an incentive to lay the Balkans at her feet and say ‘tis yours to toy with——’” he broke off.

Marie, dumbfounded, could only stare. She little doubted his capability.

“As for Louise,” he resumed, “you know, an empire signifies little to her. She is extraordinarily self-willed—my niece. If she were more like you——” his eyes were eloquent.

“I believe you are attached to her, Mademoiselle?”

“No one could be more so.”

“Ach! You would like to see one another often?”

“Why, yes, of course,” Marie was a little bewildered by his manner. “I hope to see her often.”

“And that you shall, if you will only say the word, Marie. I love you. Do not be frightened, child. I am old enough to be your father, I know, but, in



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thoughts and feelings, I am young. Long ago, there was a Duchess whom I loved and would have married, but I went off to the war, and, when I returned—she was dead. I have never married—no. I thought, every vestige of sentiment had been destroyed until you came. Will you stay and be my Queen?”

Marie shrank back a little, and, in the instant which elapsed before her answer, a hundred thoughts flashed through her mind.

About Royalty there is a charm whose potency is felt by all who come in contact with it. A crown with all the pomp and state attending, is a golden hire. To be the guardian of a nation, as it were—to hold a people's love and trust—seemed a great responsibility to the girl. What would Helene think of this? And Hal—dear Hal who loved her so devotedly himself—what would he say? Then, the King's face grew blurred and indistinct, and in its place, came another face—young, dark, with kind blue eyes.

“If I loved you——” the tone was slightly wistful, but in a moment the girl awoke. “Oh, no, no, no!”

The King, misinterpreting her agitation, drew her hand to his lips. “That matters not—love will come in time. My people are fierce and war-like, but they will accept you as their kindred. You shall be my Queen and theirs. For you, I will win back my shattered territories; aye, I will break Europe's peace if need be. They laugh at Cozhurst, but let those, who laugh, beware. Where my hand falls, it is heavy. I have one behind me, able to carry out any project—another army at my beck and call. I have no fears, my Queen, that——”

“You do not understand,” she cried, “I appreciate

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the honor, you have done me, but I can not answer as you wish. Probably, I can never care for you more than I do now. I have no faith in time."

"There is another mayhap?—" the King's eyes were hard as flint.

"No," she answered tremulously, her cheeks hot.

"Then I shall not accept defeat." Think it over if you will. Write to your guardians——"

"My guardians have nothing whatever to do with my choice."

"Then you shall be my Queen. Go, child, and think over this matter. I do not ask your answer now——"

"I do not wish to think it over," she said with emphatic spirit.

"We shall see—to-morrow. I shall be proud of you as my Queen. That you are of American blood, matters little; I can make you Royal——"

Marie had turned to leave him, but, at this utterance, she faced about, with flashing eyes; this thrust to her democratic origin angered her. "I prefer to remain an American. You do not appear to understand that a throne matters little to me. When I wed, I shall wed for love—not for the golden bauble of a crown."

The King, vaguely wondering, stared after her. "Firebrand, hey?" he mused. "Well let her sleep it over. A crown is not thrown at a girl's feet, every day, and the Vampire does not accept defeat." He was determined that she should not leave Cozhurst without accepting him.

Marie's diary gives the best record of the events of the next few days. The King's proposal seems to have strangely upset her.

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I do not remember where I went or where I found Louise, she writes. Everything seemed in a haze until we reached the fresh, open country. My first recollection of the King's talk seems to be his allusion to a greater power behind him. Every sound, I hear, forms one word—Raven. I can see the shadow of its dreadful wings, spreading to the sea. Now I know what the Emperor has to confront. If I could only give him some word of warning!

When we reached the Schloss, I told Louise my delightful visit must be brought to a close, as Harold had sore need of me. At first she seemed hurt, but I imagine, she knows the cause of my abrupt announcement. How could I remain longer after the event of this morning? The King evidently has made up his mind that I shall accept him. Louise said: "I am sorry, dear; you have made life here bearable to me. I am going to give you a bit more of my confidence, this morning. I feel so lonely and sad now. Are you firmly determined to desert me?"

After receiving my assurance, she poured out her troubles afresh and begged my advice.

Her letters from Michael have been stolen—whether at the King's orders, she knows not. Her mail is carefully inspected before it reaches her hands—so much she has learned from the faithful Ruperta. Her every ride and stroll are guarded. Michael implores her to elope with him, and she has, at last, determined to acquiesce. But how to carry out her determination is the all absorbing question. After being convinced that no power can shake her resolve, I put wit and heart at her disposal.

The elopement is all planned. Aunt Dolly, of course, had to be taken into our confidence and was

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horrified, as may well be supposed. Whether everything will progress favorably, only time will show. Auntie and I leave early to-morrow for Vorwole, where we are to remain until Tuesday of next week. Meantime this is Louise's plan:

King Lois has often proposed Louise's visiting the Emperor's sister, Princess Lena. She will agree, provided the King permit her visit to be quiet. She will say that, on account of the preparations for Lena's wedding she wishes no entertaining in her own honor. If he consent, she will set out at once—say on Tuesday. So far, so good. Then my part begins. As I said before, Auntie and I are to remain in Vorwole, a little Auzen frontier town. Tuesday night Archduke Michael will join us, and, when the Princess' private car arrives at the junction, she will take the Vienna Express with Michael. I am to go on to Auzenburg with her suite. She says, I may masquerade as the Crown Princess of Cozhurst for a week, if I wish. I wonder if the King will consent. Ah, there is Louise now!

An hour later—Aunt Dolly and I are again to ourselves—save for the busy maids. The King is very much gratified at what he calls 'his niece's return to her senses.' She says, she has promised him to try very hard to care for the Emperor. Dear Lou! Poor King! Little he suspects the treachery beneath it all. Louise is nervous to the point of breaking down, yet very happy. "My Sweet," she said putting her hands on my shoulders, "make the adventure what you will. Go to the Auzen court. Not one of the faithful few, we take, will betray us. If you see him—if you see the Emperor—but never mind; I leave all that to you. You will make a far better princess than I have ever been. Carry the affair with a high hand;

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do not be afraid. Michael and I are your staunch allies, remember."

### **VI.**

#### **IN THE RED CHAPEL.**

Both elements and Fate combined to aid in the success of the dangerous scheme. Up to the exchange of positions between the Princess and Marie, all progressed as planned—and, in fact, up to the time the private car was due to leave for the capital of Auzenburg. Then Marie's nerve gave way—she hesitated and was convinced that to carry out the remainder of the plan would develop dangerous complications. The Princess was beyond the old King's reach now—the next question was to decide what to do with the suit—faithful Ruperta and Trepohf and the car. Trepohf himself decided this for her.

The car could be delayed there till the next day. Then he would raise hue and cry that the Princess had been abducted. Meanwhile he would telegraph Her Highness. She would see that her suit was exonerated, by wiring King Lois that she was wedded to Michael—and that neither Trepohf, Ruperta nor the others were implicated in the scheme.

This was the Princess' plan in case Marie did not wish to carry out the masquerade. Captain Trepohf at once wired to Archduke Michael, and, having satisfied Marie that all would go well, he procured a compartment, for the two ladies, on the Auzen-bound Express.

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Miss Dorothy gave a gurgle of relief when she and Marie were well away from Vorwole.

"My nerves are all unstrung," she complained. "How you could bear the idea of that masquerade—even at the first—I can't see. Why, Marie, it would be like walking on thin ice—never knowing at what time you would break through. I wish Helene were in Auzenburg. I want quiet. I am tired of having every word put into my mouth—forever on needles, lest I say or do the wrong thing, or 'let the cat out of the bag.' Is that not what the Americans call it? Imagine me in such a predicament as you two rash girls had planned!"

Marie could not imagine it. She smiled to herself in the shadow of her corner, and did not deny that a sense of relief came with the knowledge that her part in the Cozhurst affair was ended—at least for a while.

"Perhaps Helene is there," she suggested. "I have not heard a word from her since leaving London. I had Captain Trepohf wire Harold, so he could meet us at the station. The Schloss is connected with the capital by telephone, now, you know, so, if Hal receives the news in time, we shall doubtless see him the moment we arrive."

After seeing that her Aunt was made comfortable Marie settled herself for the night near the window, from which she caught occasional glimpses of clustering lights flashing iridescently through the down-pour of rain. Thoughts of King Lois troubled her. She knew what a storm the marriage of the Princess would arouse, and, wondered if, in the confusion, her own part in the affair would be overlooked. Hardly, she thought. King Lois might try to make things unpleasant for her. In that event, what should she

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do? Suddenly, an idea flashed into her troubled mind. If she changed her name or only dropped part of it, to trace her movements would be beyond his power. The King would never suspect such a ruse. She had often read of such things—why not? She would be glad of the change. To roam Adrien's lofty towers and fairy dales with Harold for company, would be novel after the stately, pompous life of the last fortnight. She would tell him of her plan and seek his aid. So resolving, she fell asleep.

The next morning, when Marie and Miss Dorothy arrived at the Central station in Auzenburg, Harold's happily smiling countenance first met their gaze. He hurried the two travelers into a motor-car and they were whisked through the streets to the Hohenstaufen hotel. Harold had arrived in the city, an hour before, and had received Marie's telegram in person.

Almost immediately Marie plunged into the story of her adventure.

Harold listened with unfeigned interest and seemed much amused.

"So this accounts for your visit's being cut short," he said, leaning back to gaze at the girl. "I say, Marie, you could drop part of your name—call yourself Cecil Huntington—be my sister, if you like. I agree with you that King Lois will attempt to wreak his vengeance. Louise is beyond his reach, no doubt—Michael, I imagine, will prove a valiant champion. But even Helene and the Baron are not like a—well if you were my sister, you know, I should have more of a right to protect you—if trouble comes of the escape."

Her glance amply repaid him. "That is precisely

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what I wished. We will run out to the Schloss, you, Aunt Dolly, and I, until the storm blows over."

"Schloss," he repeated vaguely. "Don't you know, Helene is here? I should never hear the last of it, if I presumed—even at your Majesty's command—to run off with you without going to the Embassy."

"Why Hall!" she exclaimed.

"Well it is like her. Just so she hears from one, she never thinks to write. I shall be compelled to go out to the Schloss again this afternoon, but I promise to be back in a day or two."

Marie had not dared to meet Harold's eyes, since his revelation concerning Helene. Her cheeks burned painfully. Now that she had set foot on Auzen soil she was like a frightened child.

"How far is the Embassy?"

"Only two blocks."

"Let's walk then," Marie requested. "I'd like to see a little of the city."

"Suits me," Harold answered. "You will see the gay side of it, for the next few days. Preparations for the Royal wedding are going on like mad. Some petty Duke or other is expected here to-morrow, and the Prince of—humph, I have forgotten the name!"

"Rox-Bordeaux?"

"Yes, the one who is to wed the Princess. He is on the way here. See the top of that white marble building—that's the Palace. This one——" motioning to the brown stone, they were passing, "is the Council Hall, where the Emperor's messages are read, and the Diets are dissolved," he added dryly.

"Count Bracken is a leading member in the new cabinet—fine fellow with a pretty wife. Helene used to know her before her marriage to the Count. I met them at the Embassy a few days ago. Here we are,"



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—as they came to a great red brick house with broad, white steps, leading from the sidewalk.

Lady Ravenswood was at breakfast, and, recognizing the voices, wafted through the half-open door of the tiny morning-room, sprang up in excitement as the maid ushered in the beloved three—Marie, Harold and Miss Dorothy.

"Oh, I knew, when Hal rushed away this early, that something had happened! And to think that he never hinted a word to me! Didn't you get my letter?—I wrote only one I confess. Oh, this Continental mail-service! What have you done? Where have you been? Coffee, Matilde. Throw off your wraps and tell me everything."

"We have had some terrible experiences," wailed Miss Dorothy, sinking into a chair. "I admire Princess Louise, but I could never accustom myself to the ways of those people. I may be nearer alive by luncheon-time, Helene, if I may retire now . . . What a blessing to be amid English surroundings once more!"

"*Certainment.*" Helene was not unwilling. Harold, too, soon excused himself. At last the two lifelong friends were alone together.

"Your arrival is just in time," said Helene, seating herself on the arm of Marie's chair. "I would not have had you come earlier or later. We are still slightly unsettled in our new abode, but everything is progressing fairly. I should not be abroad at this unearthly hour, were it not for the diplomatic dinner, we give to-night. The round of gayety is in full swing; I am happy to have you here for the great event."

"For what, Dear?"

"The Royal wedding Saturday. Do not pretend

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that you had forgotten about it. Castle Adrien indeed! We'll see about that. You are to be introduced at Court as soon as possible." She nodded mysteriously. "He is to return this afternoon."

"I do not pretend to understand you."

Madame pinched the girl's cheek. "Your Emperor, of course—as if I were speaking of any one else! We will make the Royal girls look to their laurels, in a day or two."

Marie's protests were in vain. Madame was not to be thwarted in her desire. The question of the incognito cost her an hour of pleading and cajoling the Ambassador. Lord Ravenswood feared complications might arise should Marie's real name become known. At last, however, Madame's coaxing carried the day and my Lord washed his hands of the affair.

Both women grew uneasy as the hours slipped by.

"I am anxious to see the evening papers," said Marie, at last; "surely by now the King knows."

"Surely," repeated her Ladyship. "The Palace is reticent. The news of the Cozhurst Princess' visit was announced, late yesterday—since, no one here has heard anything. I wonder, if the Emperor knows yet. He stole a few days from State affairs to hunt in the Bläu Wald forest. Of course, messengers were dispatched to him, the instant news of the visit was received. The Emperor has to be here tomorrow in order to welcome his future brother-in-law—Prince Gustave. It seems to me that Ferdinand looks a trifle worn. 'Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.' Fortunately for us, Marie, the former Auzen Ambassador to the Court of St. James has not been replaced. Some one might attempt to inquire into the family of Mademoiselle Huntington, you know. I would prefer that Auzenburg be cap-

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tured by Marie d'Auchausen—but what's in a name? I am sure Kaiser Fritz will think Cecil as pretty as any other. It is the girl—not the name."

"Don't, Helene," said the girl flushing slightly. "If I am presented, as you wish me to be—there must be simplicity. Sometime, perhaps, to dazzle the court would please me—I am sure, I could do that" laughing brightly. "But now—your talk of Paquin and your own splendid array of gowns make me wish for—simplicity. Do not protest. I will wear my simplest frock, to-night, with roses in my hair."

"Flowers! Then you had best order at once. The little shop on the Auzenstrasse is the best—a dear little place!"

"Can I find it easily?"

"The telephone——"

"But I'd rather go. I shall not get lost, and, besides, I am wild for a canter. Hal told me, he had a horse in the stable if I cared to ride."

"You have noticed the spires of the cathedral? The Rigstadt and Auzenstrasse join there. The shop is one block to the left—you couldn't miss it. I would go with you, but I am handicapped."

Marie ordered the horse, then flew to don her riding habit. She was like a laughing, romping child. How splendid it was to be in this dear, dear city! Unknown, unrecognized—for a few days at least—she would come and go as she chose. She felt, this afternoon, that she could laugh at love, at danger. When she met the Emperor—"Fie!" she said aloud and ran down to the mounting block.

The long, white street, lined on either side by gleaming birch and silver-barked cedar trees, seemed strangely foreign. The houses were built out to the pavement with no grounds in front but luxurious

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gardens and terraces in the rear. The Rigstadt crossed the river Bläu, where it was spanned by an arched bridge, and, beyond, the King's highway wound round a cliff and passed out of sight behind the grim mass of St. Marienbaumen, the monastery.

Marie glanced at the Palace, as she passed. Several young officers in the olive and gold of the Emperor's Guard were lounging around the iron gates. The sweet perfume of flowers in the Cardinal's garden was wafted to her.

St. Marienbaumen, perched on the cliff, overlooking the lake, seemed only a stone's throw from the city; but the blue of the Alps was misleading, as the girl soon discovered.

When she turned homeward a cavalcade was wheeling into the highway from another direction. The horsemen came in triple file—a detachment of sashed and helmeted cuirassiers, mounted on coal-black horses.

"Three, six, nine——" she counted. Then came one figure, slighter, erect, a grey cape, hanging, hanging from his shoulders, his helmet surmounted by plumes that waved and tossed and glistened in the sunlight. "Three, six, nine——" again. The Emperor returning from the Bläu Wald.

Marie stared till all had passed from sight, and then rode slowly on. She was near the Embassy before she remembered her quest and—why she did not know—tingling with anticipation, went in search of the flower-shop.

The shop was a queer little place, truly foreign. As so many customers crowded before her, Marie drew to one side of the entrance to await her turn. The crowd was interesting, the babble of tongues curious, the costumes varying widely in accordance

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with the wearer's nationality and rank. Fez and top-hat jostled one another and French heels and clogs moved rhythmically with the wild music, furnished by unseen players behind an Oriental screen.

Sometime elapsed before Marie became aware of a muffled voice at her elbow—a man's voice, thick and low, speaking in a language familiar to her. He appeared to be directing his companion, and at last the sense of these broken half-whispered sentences was clear to her:

"Red Chapel, you can't miss it—four o'clock sharp—in readiness with the horses—no time to be lost—are you certain now?—smooth-faced, in uniform of Cuirassiers; you know what it means if——"

A woman's mellow voice broke in at that moment and only the last word reached Marie as the two men hurried away—"death."

What could it mean? Were they going to commit some crime? Were they murderers?—the Red Chapel at four o'clock! Marie suddenly swayed a little and turned faint. Did not the Emperor ride to the Chapel at that hour? What if they meant him harm—what if——? The papers had said, Ferdinand of Auzenburg was expected to arrive in the city and would (as was his custom) attend Vespers in the Red Chapel. An overwhelming dread took hold of her and shook her stout young heart. Resolutions, but lately made, vanished before the shadow of his danger. Why should she not save him if danger threatened. Perhaps that strong unconquerable calling of this land, which, she had persuaded herself was the assertion of that by-gone strain of Auzen blood, was for this purpose. Perhaps it was written that he should owe his life to her. At all events it was her duty to see what was to be the outcome of the

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Greek's consultation—such she knew the two men to be from their appearance as well as from their language. She, too, would go to the Red Chapel, and, if danger threatened the Emperor she would save him. There was no time to warn the authorities. How she could render service, she did not know yet, but her American heart and English tenacity, mingled with the Auzen love of adventure, made her strong.

Marie hastened out into the street, her horse forgotten, her flowers unpurchased.

Thanks to the democratic ideas of the Emperor, no guard barred her progress; no one noticed her, as she sped up the steps and into the chapel, just as the service closed.

The altar, gay with flowers, the light streaming in through the massive stained-glass windows, the monks in their sober grey, made little impression on her. Her eyes searched the throng for a group of Cuirassiers and with a quick drawn breath, she stood and gazed at him, not realizing how much her expression might convey. Near the left of the altar, before his officers, the Emperor stood, his head bent as the priest pronounced his blessing.

How straight and soldierly he looked! How strong and symmetrical his figure stood out among his sturdier guards! What a splendid face he had, dark and purposeful and proud—a face to die for!

Mechanically, Marie pushed her way through the standing people toward the altar, and found herself shoulder to shoulder with one of the Greeks, she had encountered in the shop. He held a large bouquet of red flowers, doubtless intended for the altar, Marie thought, as she saw several others in the hands of women.

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The people always lingered to see their ruler and his Guard depart.

Suddenly as if to deal a blow the Greek stepped back, and like a flash Marie comprehended what the exquisite bouquet held. His arm shot forth and the flowers with their deadly power would have crashed at the Emperor's feet, had not two strong young hands caught the Greek's wrist and sent the infernal-machine wide of its mark.

As the bomb hit the altar rail, a deafening crash came—the thunderous splintering of wood. Women shrieked. The people stumbled over one another, wildly trying to reach the entrance. The smoke cleared. The Emperor's dark skin had paled and a strange look was in his eyes. The Cuirassiers, though unable to shield him, were faithfully gathered about him.

Marie knew that she had saved his life, and was deliriously happy. She forgot the people in their terror and the assassin at her side.

Stunned by his failure, the Greek had been too dazed to think of escape. He saw that the Guard was hedging him in and now there would be slight chance of it. Fury boiled within him against the girl who had thwarted him. Wild with rage he tore a dagger from its sheath. The Emperor started forward, but too late; he saw the gleam of steel as the arm rose and fell. In an instant the Greek was in the power of the Cuirassiers, who with great presence of mind got him away before the vengeance of the people awoke.

Ferdinand had not thought of them, he forced his way down the aisle, and the people fell back out of respect for him.

Marie lay where she had fallen, face downward

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with one arm above her head. A pool of blood stained the marble floor.

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That evening there arrived in the city, travel-stained and weary Prince Gustave of Rox-Bordeaux, with a little handful of followers. The Prince, fun-loving as was his wont, and thinking to take his Princess by surprise had planned a journey overland on horseback—he and a few officers incognito. They had been set upon by foot-pads, separated, reunited again, sheltered and fed at the monastery above the city and were safely in the Auzen capital at last. The misadventures had robbed them of little of their good nature.

Almost simultaneously with the Prince's arrival, the papers just out were flaring a startling piece of news—"King Lois of Cozhurst dead. Demise of aged Monarch brought on by shock of niece's marriage. Was conversing with Chancellor when telegram from Vienna arrived bearing news of Crown Princess' elopement and marriage to Archduke Michael of Austria. People petitioning Louise to return and assume the crown."

In columns, devoted to this startling news, the details were graphically elaborated. The scenes were recounted with many additions which existed only in the fertile imagination of the reporters. The whole story was one dashing bit of romantic adventure, but, the one name, however, most intimately connected with the affair, was not mentioned. A favorite waiting-lady was said to be the co-partner of the Princess' plans, and the desperate culmination of the love-affair. A highly glowing account was rendered of Archduke Michael and a brother officer's enter-



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ing and robbing the private car of its Royal traveller at Vorwole. Never, said the paper, had there been a more daring elopement. The new Queen would return to Cozhurst, as that was the wish of the people, and her coronation would take place without delay.

What the policies of the new administration would be none could conjecture. The new Queen was thoroughly trained in Statecraft, and her fearless and assertive disposition seemed to foreshadow a complete revolution of government. Europe, and, most certainly the Balkan states were anxiously awaiting developments in that quarter.

Much was said of the consternation and uneasiness felt in Auzenburg when the Princess failed to arrive at the appointed hour, but court officials had wisely remained reticent, as it was possible that reasons of state had caused delay.

### **VII.**

#### **AT THE EMBASSY.**

Auzenburg was in a fever of excitement over the two startling events of Wednesday afternoon.

Miss Huntington's name was on every tongue; vague rumors, concerning her, were afloat; some whispered that she was an English Princess in disguise. The story of her bravery drew color as it spread. Persons, who had never vouchsafed a look at the British Embassy stopped—even came to stare—at the many windows, hoping to catch a glimpse of the inmates. A crowd thronged the street until

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late that night, eagerly awaiting news of the girl's condition. When a coach, with the Royal arms, emblazoned thereon, drew up before the dwelling, and a pompous little man alighted and entered, a quick murmur pervaded the throng, for he was the Court physician.

The wee sma' hours after midnight found lights streaming from the rooms on the second floor, and, at last, when the curtains were drawn close, and there was no further hope of learning anything, the crowd slowly dispersed; but, in Auzenburg, that night sleep was a stranger to most eyes.

Dawn found Madame, seated in a low rocker in her boudoir. Through the open doorway, she could see the shaded lights, the motionless, eagerly-watching physician, the white capped, tearful Falesse, and the blue hangings of the couch which held the Emperor's savior. Madame was unnerved; the physician had ordered her to retire, but she could not rest, and must wait, and watch with the others, and, now and then, steal to the physician's side to gaze on the still, white face, she loved so well. Baron Shuber (this was the name of the pompous little man) pronounced the girl unconscious from the stunning fall in the chapel. But was she merely unconscious? So long did the stupor linger that the belief that she was dead, crept over the faithful maids. Matilde, bending over the couch, burst into a frenzy of sobbing. Was this seemingly lifeless figure the gay, rosy cheeked, laughing girl who had ridden away that afternoon to purchase flowers?—their American Mam'selle, so kind, so gracious, so lovable, so good a mistress?

In the East appeared a halo of pink, the harbinger of the sun. Madame had moved to the window and

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was drinking in the refreshing air from the hills, when a cry from the maids hurried her to the adjoining room: Marie had raised herself on her elbow, her eyes, somewhat terrified at first, but as memory flashed back, she glanced from one to the other of the startled faces, and smiled.

"Is it nearly night?" she asked bewilderedly, "Why did you not arouse me?"

Madame flung herself down by the bed-side.

"Let me think," the girl continued. "You were to entertain, and I went to the flower-shop—and—Helene how long have I been here?"

"It is day, Ma Chere," Madame whispered, "See the sun's rays on the window. Lie down and rest; you are too weak to rise."

Ah, I know now, Marie said quietly, I recall every thing. Were you frightened—did you think me——" she hesitated.

"We were terribly frightened," breathed Madame caressing the outstretched hand. "You were so white—and still."

With difficulty, they persuaded the girl to rest quietly. A beverage was brought, at the physician's direction, and, after cheering the little group, by assuring Marie that she was in no danger (the dagger wound was slight), and having praised her heroism, Baron Shuber departed.

Quickly, the good news spread far and wide, and aroused general rejoicing.

Marie insisted that she felt quite strong enough to be up, and finally won her point.

"It was the fall, that stunned me;" she insisted the floor was so hard. I scarcely knew what had happened; when I opened my eyes, the people and the monks were all crowding around me; some one had

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lifted my head from the marble—I looked up into the Emperor's eyes. I remember, he asked my name—I had enough presence of mind to tell him my incognito and that I was the English Ambassador's kinswoman. When they moved me, I must have fainted again, for I recall nothing further until I revived here."

Madame's blue eyes were full of tears. "Every thing came in a rush," she said. "Scarcely five minutes before you were brought in, your horse came dashing home, riderless. Mon Dieu, but we were frightened!—you alone, and in a strange city!"

The girl's eyes were like stars. "He is safe! I was so afraid, I could not reach the chapel in time."

Madame clapped her jeweled hands, a habit with her when pleased. "I vow this is the best beginning for a romance I have ever heard!" she exclaimed. "You have captured the town, heart and soul. The Emperor——"

An interruption came at this moment, and Marie was left to herself to live over again in thought the past twenty-four hours. How sweet to wake up and find herself a heroine! How different her first meeting with the Emperor from what she had anticipated!

Already, Madame had built many a *Chateau en Espagne* on the foundation of Marie's little confession. What a splendid romance could develop—the spice of adventure; the intrigue of the court, and the international difficulties would lend a pretty setting. The romance of a Royal Emperor, and a beautiful American girl, with an Empire for a background and a Duchy in the balance.

The Ambassador would taboo the hint of such an attachment, Madame knew very well, but the girl had

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saved the Emperor's life—a deed not soon to be forgotten—and, if he should show a fondness for her society, why not help them to see one another? There was Countess Bracken, who detested the Chancellor, and, between them—who could say?

The interruption proved nothing less than the entrance of the Emperor's aide-de-camp. His Majesty was overjoyed at Miss Huntington's speedy recovery, and would know if he might pay his respects, that afternoon. Princess Lena tendered her earnest solicitations with a great bouquet of Royal conservatory flowers. She also desired to see the young lady, who had so nobly saved her brother's life.

Marie felt that she had never known happiness until now, and spent the time before the arrival of the Royalties in a sort of haze. Much against her will, she was carried by the Ambassador down the broad staircase into the drawing-room, where gentle Falesse made her comfortable, and hovered within call.

"What a blessing to have two such jewels!" Marie had remarked more than once in regard to the maids. Both Falesse and Matilde had been taken entirely into confidence about the Princess' elopement, and Marie's incognito. Falesse had been delighted with the anticipation of acting 'Lady in Waiting' to her mistress at the Auzen Court and, though relieved, was rather disappointed at Marie's change of plans. Both maids, however, entered into the scheme of the incognito, with all the vivacity of Frenchwomen.

The Princess and the Emperor arrived precisely at noon. Many a loyal Auzen heart beat a little faster, when the big, white motor car stopped before the British Embassy; and pedestrians were not want-

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ing to remark the two young people spring out and disappear beyond those walnut doors.

Both my Lord and my Lady had been presented by my Lord's predecessor, so the Emperor met Madame with the easy grace of an old friend. Over the space of polished floor and bric à brac, the glances of Marie and the Emperor met, as she courtesied. Advancing straight to her side he took her hand, in a manner calculated to banish shyness, "I would have spared you that effort Mademoiselle," he said quickly. "Let us dispense with formality. I came to assure myself that you are really recovering. No words can express my gratitude."

Princess Lena was no less gracious. Crossing the room and bending to the girl, she impressed a gentle, fluttering kiss upon Marie's brow. But Madame soon drew her into an animated discussion of London, and Marie and the Emperor were left tête-à-tête.

The Emperor could not keep his eyes from the girl.

A faint color mantled her cheek under the warmth of his praise. "I fear your Majesty over estimates my deed," she said, trying to speak lightly. "I did no more than any other would have done—had the gods favored another instead of me." At his request, she related the conversation which had led her from the flower-shop to the cathedral. The story was thrilling, and she did not realize how well it was told. He listened attentively, but found himself thinking more of the girl and the delicious accent of her voice than of the story.

"Of course, I had read that you were to return about that time," she told him, "and I could not free myself from the idea that the Greeks were planning mischief against you."

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"You understand their language!" The Emperor's face was a study. "There was nothing suspicious or even unusual in their appearance, and the flowers meant nothing to me—even when the villain raised them, I did not understand. But your face told me a great deal; I knew that something was amiss."

"What did you read there?"

"Terror—for my sake."

She did not dare to meet his glance.

"You are English?"

"Do I not look it?"

"You speak our language so perfectly, I am tempted to believe you are Auzen."

Suddenly conscious that she had drifted into the Auzen tongue, she laughed a little confusedly, "I could say the same of your Majesty. I could almost believe you an Englishman."

They both laughed. He was charmed by her quickness of speech, and girlish gaiety, and glad, indeed, that he had decided to attend the diplomatic banquet which had been postponed on account of her mishap. Never before had an Auzen ruler accepted invitations from representatives; the Emperor was setting a new precedent.

In the momentary lull in the conversation, the Princess' words were plainly audible. "You can not imagine, Madame, how ancient I am," she was saying. "I can not realize that it has been so long since his Majesty and I were slipping away from our nurses to wade in the lake, and climbing the hedge to steal the old Archbishop's apples, while that venerable clergyman dozed on the terrace."

The Emperor's laughter startled her, and she flushed and laughed too, having forgotten that he was so near. "Well, 'tis so"—with a scarcely aud-

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ible sigh. "You see, his Majesty does not contradict. In those days, there were no buildings where the Embassy stands—only grassy bank and trees. A great myrtle tree stood on this side, and, when the blossoms came, I wove them into my hair, like the peasant girls. On our side of the stream, stone steps led down into the water, and, when we had recrossed, I would lean from the steps and study my face in the water. Have you never noticed how flattering a mirror is the water?"

The Princess' idle mention of the connection between the Palace gardens and the Embassy sank deep into more than one mind. When they had gone, Marie turned to Madame with some mention of the subject upon her lips, but her sentence was cut short. The footman drew aside the portiere, and—

"His Highness, the Grand Duke Nacoli," was announced.

For an instant, Marie stood as though turned to stone, benumbed by the certainty of recognition. He must not see me, Helene," she whispered, and vanished by a side entrance, just as the Russian was framed in the archway.

Lady Ravenswood was anything but pleased at this unexpected turn in affairs. She was astonished; she was angry, and the crimson mounted to her brow as she swept forward to greet the visitor. Already too many shared the secret of her cousin's masquerade, and while she did not doubt that Nacoli would guard it as staunchly as those within the Embassy, she wanted a clear field for her maneuvers, unhampered by erstwhile suitors. Perhaps, after all, he did not guess that these walls sheltered Marie; but her hopes were soon shattered.

"I have surprised your Ladyship," he began, bow-



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ing gracefully over the extended hand. "The Northern Express was bearing me toward Vienna, but, knowing his Lordship to be here, and having an old chum in the city, I decided to spend a few days in this charming capital."

If he should spend a few days as he had indicated, there was little chance to keep him in ignorance of Marie's presence. Madame felt her heart sink.

"The fact is, I was glad to desert London, as our one dazzling star has seen fit to shine elsewhere. I will be honest with your Ladyship—I wish to see Mademoiselle d'Auchausen."

Madame smiled a smile, calculated to disarm even the wisest. "Mademoiselle, my cousin went to visit the Crown Princess of Cozhurst——"

"I am aware of that, Madame—I, too, visited Cozhurst, but had the unhappiness to arrive after her departure."

"She did not join us," continued Madame. "I was distressed at her change of plans, but you know my aunt——"

The Grand Duke interrupted. His eyes were twinkling appreciatively, "Madame, Madame, you are wasting words on me. I know all—I have heard all. I shall not betray Miss Huntington by word or look, but I pray you for a sight of her."

Madame's surprise overbalanced all other emotions, "How did you know?"—she began, and stopped, realizing that he might be guessing. "Your Highness is beyond me."

"Come, Madame, admit your defeat. Cupid may be blind, but his servitors are not similarly afflicted, they can see through walls of stone, and break bars of iron. This was not difficult for me: Sweet Mam'selle visits the Princess; she goes with her aunt and

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maid to Vorwole; the Princess leaves the capital, ostensibly for this city; at Vorwole, Mam'selle takes the Princess' place, and the Princess goes to Vienna—she and Archduke Michael. Following the clue, I come here—the Princess' elopement is known, Mam'selle d'Auchausen can not be located. Miss Huntington, answering in all respects her description, has saved the Emperor's life; she is at the British Embassy. May I have the pleasure of seeing—Miss Huntington?"

Madame now was justly angry. "What right have you to spy upon her—to follow her? I think you have presumed too much."

"Cupid is never presumptuous, Madame."

Madame had an inspiration. "Admitting your Highness to be correct, it is impossible for you to see—Miss Huntington. You, perhaps, know that she was wounded yesterday."

"When may I see her?"

"Perhaps—not for a week."

The Grand Duke arose. "Now, listen to me, Madame," he said suavely, but firmly, "I have crossed the Continent for the purpose of seeing Mademoiselle, and I am determined to do so, if I am forced to spend the season here. I have friends at court, and a winter in this capital would not be unpleasant. A word with Mademoiselle would have saved me this—I am determined."

At this point, the rustle of draperies made both turn, and the girl, who had remained concealed to hear the outcome of the interview, entered the room. Perhaps, where Madame had failed she could win, and send the determined pursuer away from the city without further trouble.

"Ah, your Highness!" she said, "your name works

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little short of miracles. When I heard of your being here, I was obliged to come down to greet you—imprudent as was the attempt. Madame has no doubt told you of my accident. I am still weak from the fright of yesterday, so I pray you be seated."

She sank into a chair where the soft light from the stained glass illumined her shimmering gown, and made radiant her exquisite features. She turned to the Duke a face guileless of deceit. Marie was capable of acting the role of an ingenue when she chose, and perhaps the greatest secret of the art was, that her heart was nearer to the simple girl in her teens than a worldly woman. The Duke was radiant.

Madame realizing that the affair was in more competent hands than her own, and that her presence could not be of any service to Marie, withdrew.

What passed in the half-hour that elapsed between the time that Marie entered the room and Madame left, Madame never exactly knew. Ordinary tones were audible, at first, and then, suddenly and without warning, the portières, were jerked aside and Marie stood trembling upon the threshold.

"You may do as you please, certainly," she said, "If you think to intimidate me by threats, you are mistaken. It is true that I wish to maintain my incognito, but no disclosures you can make will affect me. Do as you choose."

A few moments afterward, the Duke crossed the corridor and the street door closed upon him. Madame flew down the stair-case to find Marie just as he had left her, one hand nervously plucking the tassels of the portières, the other clenched at her side. Her face was tragic.

"Parbleu! what did he do? What has happened?"

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"Helene, I am going back to England to-morrow. I wish I had never—never come to this horrid country." The hands went up to the face and the shoulders shook pitifully.

"England! Nonsense! Tell me what he did?"

The girl threw out her hands, her head proudly raised. "He insulted me, he insulted you, he insulted the Ambassador! and threatened to disclose my identity to his friends at court. Why Helene—I am ashamed to repeat—what do you suppose he said: 'You, American girls, with your sweet faces, flaming millions, and coquette's hearts! You led me to believe, in London, that I was your accepted suitor. It is true, you did not say it in so many words, but you allowed me to monopolize you'—Think, Helene, after the way, I treated him! 'I will not mention names,' he added. Do you think me blind? Do I not know why my presence here is undesirable?—Because one, a step higher in rank, has given you a smile—has showed admiration for you. Oh, I know all! But beware lest he shatter your illusion. You would throw aside the love of an honest man for the fancy of a King.'"

The girl paused; her breath was coming in little gasps. "And that was not all but, oh, I can not remember—the fancy of a King indeed!"

"It is all the Duke's abominable jealousy, Ma Chere; do not think of it again. Auzenburg loves you, never fear. Nacoli chose the time for his visit when he knew both Hal and the Baron to be absent. Go now and rest—do not think of this again."

Before night-fall, many had inquired after the health of the heroine. Among the most prominent inquirers was the Herr Chancellor of Auzenburg and the Countess Bracken. The Countess found the

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statesman in the act of making his departure, as she was ushered into the drawing-room.

The Countess greeted the Minister with a familiar nod.

The Count vouchsafed a sour smile. He and the youthful Countess were enemies of long standing, he having incurred her hatred by violent opposition toward Count Bracken's marriage with her—a cause not easily atonable.

Dainty, yellow-haired Alis, with cheeks pink as apple-blossoms, troubled herself little about the Chancellor save, now and then, to make him feel the weight of her prestige. Being the social leader of the capital, she was as powerful in her way as he.

"Old fox!" was the Countess' comment, as the doors closed after his retreating form. "I vow, Helene, I can not tolerate that man—he makes me feel as if I were having an icy chill."

Madame laughed. "You are the same dear child," she cried, as she rang a small silver bell, "Let's have some tea and a quiet chat."

"How is your cousin, Fraulein Huntington?"

"Her head is aching severely, otherwise, I believe she is quite well. The wound is insignificant; but for the fall, she would not have fainted; as it was, she was stunned."

"Such a brave girl!" cried the Countess, "We all adore her!"

Suddenly she leaned forward, confidentially. "The Chancellor sees no peace, night and day, for fear the Emperor may take a fancy to some one beneath him in rank. The affair of the debt is common property, you know, and Auzenburg will suffer, if Ferdinand does not make some sort of marriage contract

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with a powerful state before the first day of November. You have heard the gossip, Helene."

"He has very little time in which to decide," said Madame.

Alis tossed back her yellow locks. "Do you know, Helene—though I suppose it is very unpatriotic of me even to think of such a thing—I'd give my small fortune to see Ferdinand really and truly in love, and not with a Royal woman. You know, if he ever falls in love, it will be something worth having a hand in. Just to out-wit old Fox—just to have him tricked for once! Fritz likes the stage, but even little Mademoiselle Vedette, who has had the Continent at her feet, failed to captivate him; he thought Herminie of Bohemia pretty, but he doesn't care much for dolls; our peasant girls are all pictures, and he has grown up with the court women. What I want to see is a real live, dashing romance with spice and intrigue and vim. We haven't had a really exciting Court romance since my own, so you see ——" with a little sigh—"things are growing dull. Old Fox tried to make Bracken lose his office, and had it not been for the Emperor's friendship he certainly would have succeeded; consequently Van Hellick has never forgiven me, because I helped to thwart him. He hates women. I believe there is not but one in the world who has his affection and she is his ward—Xenia Van Hellick, that dashing little brunette, who carries a wolf-hound with her everywhere she goes. The Chancellor had a hard time in his youth, it is said, and when he first entered politics, was not on the side then in power. He married a wealthy girl of the opposite party, with the hope of using her fortune and influence to climb the political ladder. However, her father lost his wealth and

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left her penniless; consequently, Van Hellick, it is said, did not grieve when she was taken from him. He is considered the most relentless enemy in the Empire, and the most difficult to out-wit."

Soon conversation assumed a lighter vein, hovering about Vienna and Paris and old convent days—long past but not forgotten. Later, however, the talkers drifted back to the subject uppermost in their minds and a mischievous little plot was formed over a dainty tea-table in the British Embassy drawing-room.

### **VIII.**

#### **A ROYAL WEDDING AND A MIDNIGHT ADVENTURE.**

The booming of cannon from the fort awakened the populace, on Saturday morning, as the sun was peeping over the Alps, and every one shook off his drowsiness long enough to remember that the unusual volume of military salute was in honor of Princess Lena's wedding day.

The sun, a great ball of molten light, almost blinked at the tremendous change in the city, he was wont to visit. Some fairy during the night had touched the streets and doorways, and lo! under the magic wand had sprung triumphal columns of flaming crimson, gay festoons of blue bunting, flowers in every window, and flags upon every roof.

Like magic now the city was astir; the few incomplete preparations of the previous night were accomplished with startling rapidity. All was in readiness long before the appointed hour. Young and old, rich and poor, exerted themselves to make the

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day memorable in the heart of their Princess. Few unsmiling faces appeared—few hands, not bearing flowers. The most garulous among the townspeople forgot to scold; the merchants were not unwilling to close their shops. Royal weddings were not every day occurrences. The streets were thronged; the gendarmerie had much difficulty to keep clear the route of the procession from Palace to cathedral. People crowded the windows, the doorways—every available standing place—and every eye was riveted upon the Palace gates, eager to catch the first glimpse of the Royalties.

The procession formed in front of the building of the Ministry of the Interior. From the sides of the improvised arch, sprang two youthful heralds—a fair-haired boy in rich blue, and a dark-skinned boy in crimson. From jaunty Tam o'Shanter with waving plume, to huge buckled slipper, they personated chivalry. Each unfurled his banner and presented it to the other—Rox-Bordeaux's silver eagle in a field of azure, and the Auzen dragon were borne proudly before the procession. One by one, the fourteenth century coaches of the Auzen nobles, moved into line—all were brilliant in color; all, heavily incrustated. Gold and silver buckled harness caught the sunlight; the splendid horses stepped forward in stately fashion; the first coach rich yellow with horses coal black, and yellow plumes tossing upon their heads; a rainbow of colors followed—purple, orange, green, vermillion—a scene that might have been taken from the Arabian Nights.

The diplomatic corps was sober; the equipages—so well known by the cockades—were entirely modern. The sombreness, however, was lightened by



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glimpses of flashing jewels and magnificent gowns; Fez and Turban, too, lent additional coloring.

Cheers burst from the waiting crowd as a regiment of Imperial Cuirassiers closed the rear of the diplomatic corps; these were the capital's pride, the Emperor's own guard, truly inspiring to behold. Officers and men were clad in milky white and silver; the horses were silver-plumed and prancing. The crowd cheered again as the Guard broke ranks, leaving room for the Imperial carriage, then the Cuirassiers again closed in about the person of their ruler, and the Prince of Rox-Bordeaux.

The suite of the German Prince added a pleasing dash of color in glittering blue and gold. After them came the Lord Chamberlain's coach bearing Countess Bracken and an aged cousin of the Emperor.

The people cheered again at sight of the Princess, who rode alone in a gilded coach, closely followed by her maids of honor.

The old cathedral, which had been the scene of many such alliances, was a veritable garden of palms and flowers. The monks, the red-robed Cardinal, the Pope's special Nuncio, all served to engraft an element of ancient splendor upon modern elegance.

As the Emperor joined his aides, his glance strayed over the brilliant throng to the representatives of foreign powers—but, almost unconsciously, he was searching for one face. Marie was beside Lady Ravenswood, her attention absorbed by the brilliant pageantry. A faint smile came to his lips, and in his eyes, could be read far more than he knew.

The girl felt his gaze and slowly her glance was lifted until it met his where it lingered for one long moment. To her the crowd grew dim; she saw only

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one figure—the Emperor of Auzenburg, the man, the idol of her dreams.

Some one else noticed, and a scowl knit his grey brows. The some one was Van Hellick, who stood near the Emperor and had followed the Royal gaze. Countess Alis also saw, and mentally congratulated herself. The stern, old Chancellor read in that swift telepathy of the eyes, a foolish fancy that might develop into something difficult for the statesman to curb. The Countess saw something deep and true—the Countess had read that same look in another's eyes, a few years before.

Gustave and Lena knelt and received the blessing of the Nuncio; the organ filled every nook and cranny of the old edifice with its floating breath of harmony—there was no longer any heir to the Auzen throne—save the Austrian cousin. The Prince and Princess drove to the Palace; the throng dispersed. The rumbling Continental Express soon bore away the Prince and the Princess Gustave. The great day was over.

Countess Alis was at once installed as mistress of the Royal household, and her sway promised an unbroken round of gaieties, as she was fond of the brilliant court of Vienna. "His Majesty" she remarked, "wil' naturally be lonesome, and it is my duty to invent new and diverting entertainments."

One of the diversions, she contemplated, would scarcely conduce to the pleasure of the ministers; but little cared she; she was determined to have Miss Huntington at the Palace as often as lay in her power.

If the entertaining before had been lavish, the whirl of gaiety under Countess Alis was positively staggering. Ancient amusements were revived; some

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were invented—all was as informal as Royal dignity could permit. The Emperor turned over the reins to the social arbiter, who held them loosely enough.

Balls and receptions followed one another in quick succession. No evening approached unheralded by some new sport. The Emperor gave the Countess *carte-blanche* as his representative.

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One peculiarly warm night, the Emperor, wearying of bridge, abandoned the gay company, and retired to his apartments. The windows, opening upon the terrace, were not lowered, and through them came the tempting murmur of the *Bläusee*. The lights of the room were turned out, the heavy hangings of the window were drawn behind him, and Ferdinand stood drinking in the voices of the night.

The greater part of the citizens had been long abed. All was quiet on that side of the palace, save for the occasional appearance of the Captain of the Guard, who was wont to pace the terraces in that quarter until the Emperor slept.

The trees and vines were very dense, but the lake shimmered in the silvery light. The moon was a mere silver disk in an almost starless sky, a thin cloudlike vapor half veiled the ethereal candles of the night. The Emperor felt strangely impelled to go to the bank—to go alone; so sending the Captain on some petty errand, Ferdinand stepped out and strode quickly down the path. In his machine, he had often eluded his officers, and, not infrequently, had gone for solitary strolls, after night had curtained the earth. There was always the thrill of adventure in such escapades. Even the Greek's attempt upon his life had failed to chill his boyish ardor.

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He came upon the bank, at the steps, of which Lena had spoken, and the sight brought disquieting memories. Across the little stretch of water, he could discern the ancient myrtle tree, and—his heart almost stood still—a light in one of the Embassy windows. "Her room," he thought, and then smiled in the dimness at the vagueness of his surmise. Perhaps, it was hers. Anyway, to watch the light for a while would be pleasant. He descended the steps and seated himself in a little boat moored to the landing obscured by a clump of shrubbery, where discovery was unlikely. If any one chanced to pass, the figure in the boat might easily pass for an officer of the Guard.

How long the Emperor sat and dreamed he did not know. At last he awoke with a start to find himself fully a dozen yards from the bank. He sprang up to find himself without oars. The water was far from shallow, and though he could swim, he did not relish the idea of returning to the Palace in a drenched condition. That would mean discovery. And, all the while he was debating what to do, the current was bearing him farther and farther from the shore.

At first, he was inclined to be angry, then he laughed. This was certainly more rigorous entertainment than he had expected. Why bother about it? There were numberless landings before the Bläusee swept into the river; he would most certainly touch somewhere. Suddenly, he became glad that few dwellings stood near the shore. The grounds of the Imperial palace, and the Archbishop's Palace, numerous public buildings and the British Embassy skirted the inlet. While he was thus congratulating

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himself, the boat came to a stand-still—high and dry on a good-sized rock.

Shove and push, as he might, the boat remained fast. In the dim light, Ferdinand discovered a ragged row of reeds, stretching from the rock to the shore, the water evidently being shallow at this point. He was so bewildered that he was not sure where he was. Several house-tops rose into view beyond the thickly-wooded shore. The Palace must be some distance to the West. Rather inclined to swear, the Emperor stepped over-board—cautiously, until sure of his foot-hold. His shoes were light, and the water soaked them readily. However, now that he was in for it, he must wade or swim. He resolved to do the former. His surmise, about the reeds, proved correct; the water was scarcely a foot in depth and full of rocks. He found himself within a few yards of the shore; a boat landing arose to his left and there, he conjectured that the water was deeper, so he kept straight ahead. Now he was on dry ground; he paused to survey his surroundings, which were certainly unfamiliar.

The moon cast its genial gleam on a sandy walk, stretching and winding, in and out, among the trees. The odor of sweet, tropical flowers was wafted lake-ward by the wind, bringing also the rustling of leaves—or was it leaves? The Emperor stood motionless for moments, until thinking that his ears had deceived him, he walked briskly inland. The outstretched limb of a tree struck him squarely between the eyes, and elicited a sharp exclamation.

A smothered cry—a woman's cry answered; a slight figure sprang up from his very feet, it seemed, and there before him, swaying with rhythmic grace, like some moon fairy—stood Miss Huntington.

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"You!" she gasped, "you!"

"You are no more surprised than I," he ejaculated. Then he told of his extraordinary ride. "Are there any boats at the landing?"

"Three," she answered promptly; "but are you not drenched? You will catch your death of cold——"

The Emperor laughed, "I am far from a hot-house plant, Miss Huntington. The truth is—if I must confess—I ran away from the Palace, and,—what I dread is getting back.

"Ran away!"

"That is, I eluded my officers. I have done it often before, but I never had quite such an experience as this. However——" with a courtly bow that was lost in the dusk, "I can not complain, since I have found my benefactress. I am sure you will not fail me in my hour of need. May I have a boat until to-morrow?"

"All three," she replied eagerly, and, then with some constraint, "they all bear the Baron's arms."

They stood in silence for sometime. He spoke first. "It would be rather difficult to explain how one of the Baron's boats came to be at the Palace landing."

"The Baron would never know; but the servants——" she hesitated. He understood. She had saved his life; he had shown more than common interest in the British Embassy already. If the Baron's boat were discovered at the Palace landing, his expedition would become public property, and the public tongue was none too kind, as he knew from experience. To him, the gossips mattered little, but the girl—he must think of her.

"If you will direct me to the gate——" he began.

Marie gave a little laugh. "It is as bad one way

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as the other. You know an Englishman's fondness for bull-dogs? The Baron owns one reputedly of the fiercest breed. I might conduct you to the gate, but Zeus would arouse the household. Every one had retired before I slipped out, so, you see, we can hardly do that." She remained thoughtful for a moment. "If you will accept my services, I will row you to your landing." His eyes were laughing.

"You row me!" he exclaimed.

"Why not?"

He did not answer the query. "Are you sure you could come back—alone?"

"You doubt my ability to row? Don't you know that training in out-door sports is part of an English woman's education? Why Madame, fragile as she looks, can handle the oars like a sailor. Come, let us go to the landing."

Side by side, they went to where the wooden platform and boat-house jutted into the tide. The boats were in place, as Marie had stated. He assisted her into one and loosing it from the moorings, followed and pushed off. She had seized the oars, but he took them from her, saying that she would find sufficient exercise on the homeward stretch. For a long time, little was said. The girl sat very quiet, now and then dipping her fingers in the water. The fickle moon was again in hiding, half concealing the two figures.

There was mastery in the strong, easy strokes that rippled the tide. And there was something irresistibly amusing in the fact that Royalty could row. Red stained the Emperor's cheek, as he recalled the irritable exclamation elicited by the limb of the tree.

His anxiety to reach the farther shore had sud-

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denly abated. "Do you ever have nights like this—in England?"

"Not like this," she answered dreamily.

Not like this! Ferdinand found himself wishing the inlet a score of miles across. No, there had never been one quite like this in Auzenburg before. "Do you always come into the gardens or on the shore, in the evenings?" he queried involuntarily.

She started a little; "Not always. That is I never have until this evening—here, but the night was so quiet, the water so inviting that I could not resist."

"Nor could I," he rejoined, thinking of Alis and the gay company, he had left. The girl was speaking again.

"The water of the Bläusee is so peaceful—not a bit like the firth at home. Scotland is a desolate country anyway—that is, compared with this. The scenery is all grey—moors and cliffs, and the water is rough along the coast—but, I suppose, you've been there."

"Yes, but that doesn't take away the charm of hearing about it. Scotland has sea coast to spare. I wish, we had some of it."

"What would you do with it?"

"I should convert it into a chain of forts and set about building a navy."

"Fortifications like you have in the North?" she said quickly. "Their unique plan has already startled Europe. Why, I heard Lord Bradford say——" she stopped confused, suddenly remembering that she was speaking to a sovereign.

"Lord Bradford! What did he say?" The oars ceased their undulations and the Emperor leaned forward eagerly. "Admiral Lord Bradford showed especial courtesy to me when I visited England, some



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years ago; he even praised some of my unformed ideas about guns and fortifications."

"That was what I was going to tell you," she laughed, feeling again, at ease. "He said—to repeat his own words—that young man is a veritable Napoleon. It is expedient that some country produce another Wellington."

There was nothing to do but laugh, and Ferdinand laughed heartily. Just how near Bradford was to the truth, that nobleman never realized until years later.

They had reached the Palace wharf and, giving Marie the oars, the Emperor sprang ashore. As the boat scraped the landing he held it, and kneeling caught the girl's hand.

"Good-night," he said fervently, "I shall stay here until I know you are at home."

The touch of her soft, warm fingers thrilled him through and through, and the pressure, he gave them, was far more than friendly. His cheeks were hot and his eyes dangerously alight with the story of something that sprang to his lips—but the boat floated away—and the girl.

True to his word, the Emperor waited until he was certain the boat had reached the far side, then, swung on his heel, to look into the impassive countenance of his ever faithful aid-de-camp.

The next morning, Countess Bracken accosted the Emperor on his way to the mounting block. "Oh, your Majesty!"

Tossing cap and riding-crop aside, he hastened toward her. "You are abroad with the birds. I know I deserve a scolding for running away, last night, in the midst of that game, but, honestly, bridge bores me to death. That is one of the things, I wish we

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had not imported along with other English customs."

The Countess laughed gayly, not at all concerned at her sovereign's honest disapproval of the favorite game, but, in an instant, she was sober again, and troubled little wrinkles appeared upon her brow. "Do you know, you are dreadfully hoarse. I was afraid, last night, that open window was too much on your back—but you wouldn't let me close it. Next time, I shall defy your orders. Have you any special plans for this afternoon?"

"My routine is about as usual," he answered, coughing slightly. Until that moment, he had forgotten the soaking, his feet had received the night before. "I ride now, and breakfast with Monseigneur, the Cardinal, on my return. At ten o'clock, I receive Von Bertrom and Van Hellick; then, I am at leisure until luncheon. The British Minister has asked for an audience at one, and—yes, the agent of that English banking-house—Covell and Huntington, I believe it is—has an appointment for one-thirty. After that, I am at your service."

Alis beamed. "I have planned an informal sort of entertainment, if it meets with your Majesty's approval.

"Let's hear about it."

"A ride to St. Marienbaumen."

"How many are going?"

"Let me see——" counting on her fingers, "the Austrian Minister and his wife, Lady Zenia, Otto, of course, Lord and Lady Ravenswood, and Monsieur and Mademoiselle Huntington. Now, if your Majesty had other plans——"

"No, indeed! I merely wondered whom you had invited. Now I must be off or Monseigneur will be nodding over his coffee."

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The Countess stood on the terrace and watched him ride away, as his sister had watched him for so many years. She reminded him of his sister as she stood there—only Alis was more fragile, of more ethereal build. The golden sunlight streamed over her white dress and the load of flowers in her arms, and her silken molten hair, and the ivy and weather-stained marble made a fetching setting for that dimpled, blithesome face. She was the staunchest friend he had in the capital, and he valued her at her true worth. Instinctively, he felt, that if ever a time came when he needed assistance in love or in war, she would be his strongest ally.

Van Hellick, on arriving at the Palace, dared to remonstrate with the Emperor.

"Your Majesty has shown the young English lady a great deal of attention."

"Which is but a poor return for her bravery."

The old Statesman scowled. Evidently, he did not think so. "You had your own physician attend her; flowers were sent her from the Royal conservatories; the Princess showed her especial favor, and your Majesty called as soon as her health would permit. Then you attended the Embassy *fête*——"

"Could I have done less?" the Emperor asked impatiently.

"——then the auto parties, and the cards to the Palace ball——"

"My faith," exclaimed Ferdinand, looking at the old man with little short of wonder. "I heard one of my officers say, he believed you could read the mind. I confess, I am almost convinced of it, but Count, I do not relish too much interference. Use your inimitable talents where they will prove of more service."

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The Chancellor, though rebuffed, was flattered by this acknowledgement of his ferret-like ability.

"For this afternoon the Countess has planned a riding-party to St. Marienbaumen, in which Miss Huntington is included. I suppose the Abbot will entertain us."

"St. Marienbaumen!" Here was something the old man had failed to discover. "Mien Gott, Sire! To what is this coming?"

"Is there anything so startling in what I said?"

"The Court is beginning to talk——"

"Of what?"

"Of your attentions to Fraulein Huntington, I have heard——"

"We will leave the subject till to-morrow. It is already one o'clock, and I must give the British Ambassador a few moments."

Van Hellick ground his teeth as he saluted Lord Ravenswood on the threshold. The very knowledge that the bland and pompous Englishman had presented the girl at Court was enough cause for hatred. The old man paused and mechanically smoothed his hat. "We will see, my Lord," he grumbled; "we will see. The Emperor shall not be made a fool—even by Cecil Huntington."

### **IX.**

#### **IN THE MONASTERY GARDEN.**

As the Emperor made ready for the ride to St. Marienbaumen, he thought over his conversation with the Covell and Huntington agent. "I would

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give much to know the motive," thought he, "in that Englishman's perseverance. What can make a piece of canvas so valuable to his employers? But the portrait remains in my possession. It would take more than English gold to buy it now." His spirits ran high as, accompanied by the select few of the court, he rode to meet the two Ambassadorial parties. The diplomats were at the rendezvous; one gay cavalcade was already formed. The riders dashed forth boldly into the open country, crossed the river Bläu, and took a winding road, famous for beauty, which by a circuitous route led to the monastery.

Though the highway would have permitted four abreast, the little troop formed into pairs. Lady Xenia and Harold led the way; Otto von Wieben and Marie were close seconds; the Emperor and Countess Alis were in the center; and following came the young Austrian Ambassador with Madame, and Lord Ravenswood with the Austrian's dashing wife.

The diplomats kept up a running fire of wit and raillery. Four individuals more ready in repartée had never been thrown into one another's society. The Austrian Ambassador's wife, almost fancied herself back in Vienna, save that, in this atmosphere, she felt at ease and with no dread of a gargonizing stare from the Royalties.

Harold found Count Van Hellick's ward far the most attractive Auzen woman, he had seen; and Von Wieben was far from displeased with his companion. Princess?—perhaps; it was a pleasing fancy. Perhaps, a Royal romance would develop. Evidently, the Emperor adored her already. And small wonder. Who could have rendered him a greater service? Although a Princess, she embodied as de-

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licious, vivacious and sparkling a bit of Royalty as ever trod the soil. She seemed more flower than maid, more fairy than human. Von Wieben had a knack of associating people and things, and must find comparisons for her. If he had ideas about the lake adventure of the previous night, he kept them to himself.

The Countess and the Emperor were the least talkative of the group. Whenever she glanced at her companion, his eyes were on the girl ahead. Now and then, Alis smiled.

"She is very beautiful, is it not so?" innocently inquired the golden-haired conspirator.

The Emperor startled guiltily; he was as much confused as a school-boy, detected in mischief. The Countess had much ado to keep from laughing.

"Miss Huntington? I think so. Yes, she is beautiful."

"She will make a great match, some day. They tell me, many of our noblemen are desperately in love with her already."

"How long is she to be with us, Countess?"

"Really, I have not heard. Not long, I suppose—in fact, she was speaking of Vienna, last evening."

The question was asked as casually as it was answered, but the Countess had seen a deal of men in her day and understood this one far better than he suspected. Quickly, she changed the subject, nor could he lead her to speak of the girl again.

No artist's brush could portray the beauties of the old monastery. Scenes, often exquisite in nature, defy reproduction. St. Marienbaumen on a storm-driven night was not the St. Marienbaumen of a sunny afternoon. Alps and sky and good green earth gave it a setting that softened the hugh, weather-

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beaten towers. Ivy and moss had vied with one another in covering the outer wall, until the principal building seemed to spring from a couch of vines. Here and there, over the landscape, a grey-garbed Franciscan tended a flock of goats. Every thing indicated peace and plenty. Hardly possible did it seem that, in the twinkling of an eye it could be transformed into the most formidable fortress of Southern Europe. In Auzen history, the Monastery plays no mean part. Strange and stirring scenes have been enacted there.

Once inside the gates, our travellers found themselves on an asphalt court, brightened by round and square beds of scarlet flowers. The Abbot and several monks had met the exalted visitors; the cavalcade was heartily welcomed. Soon the party went on a tour of inspection. The historic library was visited, and various work rooms, as well.

At his Majesty's request, the Abbot pushed ajar the cloister door, and afforded his guests a peep at the long, white hall with its rows of sunny cells. He, then conducted them through the vast conservatory.

The flowers were the Abbot's pride, and he was delighted with his sympathetic visitors, who eagerly examined and discussed the plants, while admiring their beauty and inhaling their fragrance.

Countess Bracken, wearying of the conversation, drew Otto ahead to where the Emperor and Marie had paused.

"Your Majesty, have you told Fraulein Hunting-ton of the great rock above the lake? No? She must see the city from our aerie. I never beheld a grander view."

Abbot Constantine at once offered to act as guide, but the Emperor graciously bade him return to the

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Ambassadors, as both he and Otto knew the old place well.

The four strolled into the grounds. The Countess, plucking Otto's sleeve, hung back, until the Emperor and his companion had passed from view at a bend in the path. Then Alis discovered a clump of luxuriant clover and refused to stir from the spot until she had searched for the four-leaf emblem of fortune.

The path to the cliff was partly on the very brink of the ridge, and afforded rather precarious footing. The Emperor took the girl's hand to assist her over the worst places—he laughingly waved all formality. "Miss Huntington," he said in response to her protests, "I scandalized my Royal cousins, long ago, by holding court in the Palace gardens under the silver-barked fir-trees, using a knoll of moss for a throne, and permitting my officers to sit and chat familiarly in my presence. To-day, I believe any man in my army would say before me what he would say behind my back. I abhor the rigid formality of some of the courts, with their eternal squabble over precedence."

"Do you know," she said, giving him a mischievous glance, "I believe, you are the most serious person alive. We never converse without speaking of the diplomats or the army or something equally sober. Last night, for hours, I could not sleep, for thinking over what you had said about forts and navies, and I became actually frightened."

He smiled, "I have never lived in a very frivolous atmosphere. Of what do you wish to talk?"

"You."

He gave her a quick look. "I am afraid that would be an uninteresting subject."



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"Not to me," she answered naively, "I have read and heard so much of you."

"What phase of me will interest you most?"

"Oh, from the first, as far back as you remember—if you do not mind."

Unconsciously, his fingers tightened over the little hand. "That would involve a deal of more serious talk, and you do not care for that. There is not much to tell any way—not much concerning me, for children, in those days, were never allowed to appear in public, except on festive occasions. My sister loved dolls, and a girl's playthings—my hobby was a wonderful wooden army. When we grew older she learned domestic arts, and I was occupied with fencing and riding-masters. We had different tutors; I was supposed to study the laws of my country, and all that; however, we were boon companions. My memory of my mother is very dim—they say I am her image, except that she was fair. The Emperor, my father, lived until I was eighteen; then, I was called from my studies to the throne. And that is all—if I omit such escapades as my sister recalled at the Embassy. I am sure that we were the despair of our nurses. My one failing has always been a desire to run away, and I did so then more frequently than now."

Their glances met, laughter in both at the memory of the lake adventure. She drew her hand away; something in his eyes made hers waver and fall.

At that moment, they came out upon the rock. The towers rose to the left and, far below lay the city. The grandeur of the scene was fascinating—the beautiful capital, the lake stretching for miles into the hills, and, far in the distance, a few snow-capped

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peaks of the Transylvanians. To Ferdinand, the picture was old but none the less alluring.

"Many a time, from here, I have watched the sun disappear beyond the peaks," he said at last. Until this recent international trouble, I was in the habit of cantering up here in the evenings. I am fond of the forest and the mountains——." Suddenly he stopped short. Often had he said such things to her—things that betrayed his nature, his likes and his dislikes, things that concerned his country, too. Somehow, he knew that she understood. Never once, had he asked himself why he placed such implicit confidence in the girl. Perhaps, he was afraid of the inevitable answer. To a certain degree, he was master of his emotions. He saw her day after day, talked with her, danced with her, rode with her, and never one word of anything, save friendship, had escaped his lips. Yet he knew, and knew well, that this state of affairs could not last.

There is a limit to all endurance, and he realized that each day—each sight of her—hastened the inevitable crisis. Day after day, he looked the portrait of his mother in the face and turned from it with troubled eyes.

There had been a time in the girl's life—a time not many days remote—when she dared dream of the wondrous glory of his love, not that she thought to win it, but there are few indeed in this world who do not dream, and the less tangible the fairy-web of thought, the more alluring to mortal touch. But, of late, all her fancies had fled, shame-faced. She was happy in his friendship. Oh, if that could only last! She felt that if a time ever should come when he cared—more—just the knowledge would glorify the years to come. Sooner or later, they must part—

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his duty was to the state, and some foreign land would call her. Somewhere in the by gone centuries, had lived a King Cophetua and a beggar maid—but Ferdinand was a king of to-day, and insurmountable barriers separated him from her, even should he ever love her. Brave resolutions did she make, but they failed to hide the rose, that flamed to her cheek at the sound of his voice, and the softness that welled to her eyes as they encountered his.

"Rock Paradise"—as the cliff was called—and the absence of the other members of the party, boded ill for the plans of the Auzen Chancellor and the ancient traditions of the house of Hohenstauffenn.

"Oh! what is that?" cried the girl, noting a wisp of shimmering silver in the distant valley.

"The lake?"

"No, no," indicating with her hand. "See, where the mist is rising."

He shaded his eyes to look—a graceful gesture; the free swing of the arm, and his dark, strong fingers that shadowed to deeper olive his sober, striking face. "That is the river Bläu."

The girl startled—the pose he had assumed was strangely familiar. Mist and valley stirred strange memories. Where had she seen all this before? Ah!—in the dream.

The glow of the evening light was in his eyes as his hand fell to his side. Her bosom heaved and the color ebbed from cheek and lip. Her glance fell to her gauntlets and the flowers the Abbot had given her—and the Emperor understood. Suddenly, restraint flew to the winds; he drew the girl close, and pressed his face against hers.

"Cecil—Cecil, I can not fight any longer—I can not

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make myself believe I do not love you. I want to hear you say that you care—my own, my Queen!”

“I do care,” she whispered, “so much—so much.” Then quickly, she drew back from him. “Oh, if these fair days of perfect friendship could only last a little longer, but you have broken the magic spell—you have banished me from your court. But, as you ask me, I will say ‘I love you’—before I go.

“I do not understand.”

“You do not understand?” she flung at him. Can I remain here now, keeping you and your duty apart? Do I not know what you owe your country?” Brave though she was, her voice faltered, though her eyes did not waver. “This one little hour may belong to us—if you will—and then, England, for me.”

“Not England, Sweet, but Auzenburg—Auzenburg, for I will not let you go. You are mine, you belong to Auzenburg and—to me.”

“You must not make rash assertions—I realize the barriers between us.”

“I realize, Cecil, that, for my country’s sake this ought not to be—but I love you; I will not give you up. I ask you to love me—to be faithful to me, and, I will make you my Queen.”

“Cecil, do you realize what ‘duty,’ as you term it—as the Ministers term it—means to me? If I were forced to give you up, the future would be unbearable. Do you realize what it means? The most powerful example of devotion to that kind of duty is my mother. Perhaps, you have heard the story—it is but one among hundreds of similar cases.”

Marie’s lips trembled; her eyes filled slowly. She had heard the story of Sophia of Athol, but, from him, who told it with such emotion, it carried a new sadness. Somehow, on this great Continent—so far

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away from the land of her birth, so cruelly severed from her nearest of kin, by that Leveler of great and small,—Helene and Hal, and the Baron, dear as they were, seemed very distant. The love of her childhood and maidenhood was very, very near.

Her thoughts had reverted to an evening of Indian Summer in far-away America—an evening such as this, with glorious scenery on the land and tender tints in the sky. She could see again the cottage, the snowy chrysanthemums, the artist at his work beneath the maple trees; the white grey-hound following a little dark-eyed girl—

How the scenes had changed! The dear old cottage was in ashes; the artist had been dust these many years; the hound had been long forgotten; the child, left in the care of an English aunt, had drifted away. One brilliant winter had brought, to the capital, Helene and the Ambassador; at the close of his stay as representative, Marie had returned with them to England. Scenes of London, Paris, and Vienna passed before her as in panoramic vision.

And, yet, through all the intervening years, the childish fancy, kindled by the artist's stories, of Auzenburg and the youthful Emperor, had grown and strengthened. Surely, Destiny had willed all this, had drawn her over foreign lands to the Emperor—the direct descendant of Emperor Hadred whom Izora de Cosa had so despised. It must have been written that, after so many centuries, the last of those two great houses should meet and love. What strange caprices has Fate!

"Cecil,"—his words broke on her thoughts—"promise me that no one shall come between us—that you will be true to me. If abdication were the only course open, I would not count that a sacri-

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fice. The Ministers pledged their word to my father that Ludwig of Austria should never sit upon the Auzen throne. That is my strongest hope, my Empress, my Queen!"

After a moment, she gently pushed his face away. "Listen! Is that not the Countess' voice?"

The Emperor was too happy to care. "Though you are not of Austrian descent," he said repeating her words—nor of Auzen, you are much like one of our old Baron's daughters—the Countess de Cosa. Of course you have heard of Castle Adrien?"

"Yes," the girl started slightly.

"About five years ago, some of Castle Adrien's rare old paintings were sold. Lena would have me go with her to the National Art Salon. I saw and got possession of the portrait of Countess Izora de Cosa. I grew to care for the painting, and believed that somewhere in the world must be a counterpart of that portrait—as beautiful, as lovable. I looked for her in London and in Berlin and in Saint Petersburg—but without success. And at last, she came to me."

A soft yodle, heralding the approach of Otto and Countess Alis, rose upon the air.

"I would lose my epaulettes, were Count Van Hellick in our party," observed Otto as they neared the rock. "Ach, Madame, how is it that you make all men your tools."

"Have you forgotten how to yodle?" his companion inquired abruptly. "Answer that bird's call. I remember you used to do such things beautifully."

The Emperor had released Marie, and stood looking at her with the old, old story written all too plainly upon his face. "Himmel!" whispered Otto, "had we best disturb them yet?"

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The others are on the way—yes, come. Ach! smiling as both the Emperor and Marie turned toward them. "See, I have found a four-leaf clover for each of you. Fraulein, have you ever seen the growing shamrock?"

The appearance of Madame and the Abbot, as well as the other members of the party, forestalled an answer.

"You see," said the Emperor, addressing the Ambassadors, "while you were revelling in highly cultivated plant-beauty, Miss Huntington and I have been enjoying the wild grandeur of the Alps, and I warn you, though Father Constatine prides himself on his flowers, 'tis the Edelweiss that is close to his heart, and spare moments find him on this eyrie with ancient philosophic maxims for company."

"And you, my Son?" cried the Abbot with a twinkle in his eye.

The Emperor laid a hand affectionately upon the Abbot's shoulder, "And I," he said, "doubtless my love of books is inherited, but the fondness was fostered by you—and Monseigneur."

On reaching the British Embassy Harold announced his intention of making a flying trip to London. Lord Ravenswood drew him into the library. The gaiety of an hour before had passed, leaving my Lord more grave than usual, by way of contrast.

"Harold, I am going to entrust to you some papers for safe delivery. Sit down and give me your opinion of this abominable Balkan trouble."

Harold did not avail himself of the offered chair; instead, he faced the Ambassador with hands in his pockets and feet planted apart.

"It almost passed belief," said he, "that the patriarch of the corps should desire the opinion of a

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'hare-brained youth.' My ideas would seem childish to you, I fancy, Baron. And besides, I am not able to add one tithe to the mad stories and rumors afloat, and I am unable to refute them authoritatively."

"Drop nonsense, Huntington, for a while. I am in the dickens of a predicament. I absolutely know nothing more than I did when I came here. I have not gained an inch of footing with any one in a position to look behind the scenes. Count Bracken, for all his wife's friendship, is about as communicative as a clam. The others are no better. The Auzenburg papers are unreliable, as their owners are in the hands of Count Van Hellick. What the deuce do you think of affairs here?"

The young man's expression changed. "To get down to plain facts, Baron, this Balkan war-scare has come at a very inopportune time for Auzenburg. Though I have no authority on the subject. I have been told that the greatest banking houses on the Continent have refused to lend her six millions at any rate of interest. Were I an Auzenburg, I should not tell you that, but we are both Englished."

Lord Ravenswood flicked the ashes from his cigar. "I can not understand that. If the country does not lose Annaistane, her notes are as good as gold. All countries are in debt more or less—look at Turkey. My idea when I came was to investigate Auzenburg's resources; that explains my frequent absences from the city. Why, Huntington, in the great river-basin, the grain produce is almost beyond belief; the timber-lands are good; fruits, such as Southern Italy produces, are plentiful and the wealth of roses and perfume manufacture is amazing. It is said that Turkey discouraged cultivation and trade, but, since her withdrawal, Auzenburg has made rap-



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id head-way industrially. I have heard that Cozhurst was anxious for an ally in this nation as was Servia, also."

"What do you think, Baron, of the hint that some greater power is pulling the strings?"

My Lord, for once, forgot his non-committal attitude.

"By thunder, it is true! As for Servia——" he gave his monocle-ribbon a disgusted jerk, "her bombast would be pitiful, were there not a deeper undercurrent. Cozhurst, it seems, has completely subsided since the death of King Lois. A pretty coup of the Raven's in turning attention from her own annexation of the provinces."

"You believe Austria behind them?" Had Harold's face not been turned away, my Lord would have seen little short of amazement written there. "That makes me think, Baron, have you ever seen the Emperor's private secretary?"

"Certainly," responded the Ambassador in some surprise, "he appears at all the social functions."

"I do not mean that—I mean before you came here. From all appearances he is of Italian blood, though Antonio Wiebenovitch is not an Italian name. I never met him until a few days ago. Countess Alis has a weakness for match-making, I believe. She had me around and Lady Xenia and some other young people. Wiebenovitch happened in. The instant I saw him a vague recollection of his face came to me—but where have I seen him? I wish you could have witnessed our meeting—he whitened perceptibly. In the conversation, 'gay Diana' mentioned Nacoli, and Monsieur Wiebenovitch departed almost precipitately. Somehow, I have a longing to see him without mustache and imperial."

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"Huntington, that man stirred some stagnant memory-cell in my brain, also. I have tried to convince myself that it was only a passing resemblance, but we certainly have met before. This continued changing from place to place makes a person forgetful. I meet so many people. He is a favorite with Count Van Hellick, it seems."

"He is a cat's-paw of Count Van Hellick's, I imagine. Well, Well, Baron, I suppose Marie—Cecil, I mean, is waiting for me, now. She has some important instruction for me before I go."

"You surely spoil her, Harold," the Ambassador reproved smilingly. You are humoring whims which her husband must combat."

Harold's face clouded slightly; then he laughed.

"Why don't you cut out these noblemen and carry off the prize yourself?"

"Because 'the prize' won't have me, Baron," was the frank answer. "My heart has been her footstool since Aunt Dolly took her in charge. I have been big-brother and playfellow and adviser, but nothing more."

The Ambassador sighed, and re-lighted his cigar.

Harold found Marie in her den, seated at the writing table. Pushing aside the writing material, he seated himself on the low table-top and took both her hands.

The conversation, which ensued, was long and earnest, and both were smiling when they arose.

"I was afraid you'd think I had lost my senses," she said hesitatingly. "Of course, Hal, you'll mention nothing of this to the Baron."

"Hardly," he said. "If the Baron were only the Baron—but England must not know. Of course you are safe in telling Helene—Helene and you and I, the

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allied powers, sworn to help and protect each other. If the political allies were half so leal and true, there would be less trouble. I believe, Dear, that Nacoli has left the city for good. He will not dare to put his threat into execution. Of course, I'll return from London, the instant I can."

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The Ambassador suddenly decided to make a visit of several days to Vienna, and left hurriedly. Both Madame and Marie were glad of a quiet evening at home. Of late few words concerning the Emperor had passed between them. The girl avoided the subject, and Madame waited patiently, but when the confession about 'Prince Charming' came, she was not surprised. She was seated amidst a perfect ocean of invitations, favors, and menu-cards, when the girl startled her by saying: "I am too happy to live!"

Madame glanced up quickly. "Ma Chère!"

The girl sank on the hassock at Madame's feet. Helene—dear Helene, little did I dream, he would ever care, and, yet, this afternoon, he asked me to be his wife—his Queen."

"The Emperor?" gasped Madame.

The girl spoke earnestly, and Madame listened with bated breath, ending in a low cry of ecstasy.

What a surprise every thing will be to him, and this last most of all!"

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### **X.**

#### **THE AFFAIR AT THE HOTEL AND THE CONSEQUENCES.**

Shortly after Harold Huntington's departure for England, a gendarme came to the Minister of Police with the information that the Grand Duke Nacoli was again in the city and, at that moment, was dining in a private apartment at the Hohenstaulfenn Hotel with the Emperor's secretary.

The gendarme himself was not slow in conjecturing that the Russian nobleman's visit was of some importance to the Crown. Every one in the capital knew that the pompous, spectacled little Minister, who presided over the gendarmerie, was merely a figure-head, so to speak, and that the iron-handed Chancellor used him as a cat's-paw. With every eye and ear of the gendarmerie and secret service at his disposal, why should not Van Hellick know the innermost details of every important event within the city? The temper of the soldiery, the nature of the students, harangues, the gossip of the court, the happenings in the Bohemian quarter—all this was at his fingers' ends.

So we may readily surmise that the Chancellor was at the back of this investigation of the Russian's visit. What the motive, he alone knew. No one was ever fully admitted to his confidence. When he was obliged to show his hand, many of the cards were turned face downward. Ferdinand was the only person who dared to turn them over. Thus the old man, who cowed and domineered others, was, in

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a measure, held in check by the Emperor. Van Hellick had ridden rough-shod over the former Emperor, and this change of policy was little short of gall and worm-wood to him.

The new Ministry was considered the cleanest, strongest, most capable, and the most representative in the annals of Auzenburg, and that Arran Bracken, hated, and, perhaps, too, a trifle envied of the Emperor's esteem, should be the dominating spirit, was another source of grievance to Van Hellick. Count Bracken was a Liberal, the Emperor's tendencies were Liberal, and the Chancellor was a strict Conservative. Perhaps, "Iron-Mask" foresaw a Liberal premier in his shoes, therefore he did not bear any friendship for his possible successor. He knew that Count Bracken was considered, by Liberals and Conservatives alike, the most promising statesman in the country.

The facts, concerning Nacoli's mission, were meagre enough. Whence he came was unknown; on his previous sojourn in the capital, he had searched the list of arrivals at the leading hotels; had inquired the whereabouts of an English lady by the name of D'Auchausen; later, he had called at the British Embassy, on the same evening, he had ridden, unattended, out of the city toward the East. The most interesting fact, perhaps, was that he and Antonio Wiebenovitch were friends of long standing. This scrap of information caused a stir in court circles, and the rumor spread that the Russian was the bearer of important official papers; some people even went so far as to assert that he came direct from Servia. But Nacoli did not seek an audience with the Emperor, and did not visit the Chancellor.

The British Embassy had enjoyed a full share of

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publicity of late. So it chanced that Nacoli's second visit to that mansion did not pass unnoticed, especially as his companion was the Emperor's secretary.

The news of their arrival created little short of a panic at the Embassy. Madame, already arrayed for calling, nervously wrung her hands, Marie, though equally upset did not betray her emotion; Madame was hysterical; Marie, indignant.

"Oh, mon Dieu!" Madame exclaimed in an exasperated wail, "what do you suppose has prompted this bare-faced impudence—and with his Majesty's secretary! What shall we do? Oh, if Hal were only here! Abominable wretch! If he means to tell anything why doesn't he do it and be done with it?"

Marie was uncertain. "He can hardly mean to expose my masquerade—if so, why should he wait?" Suddenly, she threw up her chin defiantly—a determined little chin for all its dimples. "Fie, Helene, I am not afraid! Now that I have entered into this adventure, I'll brave it to the end, as Louise says. If we refuse to see him, he may cause a scene, and, just now I do not want a scene. Come, we will beat him at his own game—whatever that may be," she added under her breath.

"A thousand million pardons for interrupting a delightful round of calls—or is it a shopping expedition?" the Grand Duke bent gracefully.

Both women received the visitors cordially. Nacoli was nonplused. "What a jewel!" entered his mind more than once, and he called himself some uncomplimentary names at the recollection of his jealous outburst in that same room. His former visit was not suggested, and he began to believe that the girl had forgiven, if not forgotten. Anyway he was on

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a fair road to make amends. He had not travelled all the way from London for nothing. The next time, he would call alone—catch her unaware if possible, and renew his suit with vigor. As he conversed he calculated the many uses to be made of the Secretary. Intuitively, he knew that he had taken a false step in his thrusts at the Emperor. A woman naturally defends the maligned, and a sharp idea entered his mind.

Under the spell of the Russian's eloquence, the girl almost forgot his serious affront. He was a master of tones and of diction, and, when he chose to exert his exceptional power, there was no resisting the enchantment. Marie, though angered, had disliked to judge him harshly. He was high-tempered, and, she admitted even to Madame, that, on the day of the altercation, she had been unnecessarily provoking.

If Nacoli had thought to frighten the two women into seeing him by his choice of the Emperor's Secretary as a companion, he had counted well—he knew, that for political reasons, they dared not refuse.

"Where in the world did you ever meet such a run-a-bout as His Highness?" Madame could not resist inquiring as their visitors arose to depart.

Marie watched Nacoli as, tapping his gloves, he gazed from under slightly drawn brows at the Secretary. The look was piercing. Wiebenovitch glanced at the Russian with a smile that projected his waxed mustachios almost at an acute angle, before he answered:

"Madame, his Highness is an old, and valued—highly valued—friend of mine. Indeed, I can hardly remember when our friendship began."

Nacoli made some nonchalant allusion to Paris,

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that most Bohemian of cities, and left the impression that the acquaintance had begun there.

Exerting his influence, in behalf of the Grand Duke, the Secretary easily obtained for him a card to the Palace ball that night. Since the new regime under Ferdinand, there was little or no difficulty in gaining entrée to the Palace fêtes especially if one had a friend or even an acquaintance at court.

In this city, as in all large cities, are three distinct classes: the state officials, the nobility, and the soldiery constitute the first; the wealthy middle-classes—mostly merchants, the second; and the great mass of the common people, the third. In the first named class, the statesmen and soldiery command the same respect as the nobility. In many instances, noted public men of the Liberal faction, have risen from the ranks; on the other hand, the Auzens have unlimited regard for the militia, and, in most instances, the olive and gold insignia ensure a guarantee of courtesy and consideration for the wearer. Perhaps, the main reason for this deference arises from the fact that the Auzen soldiers have conducted themselves with sobriety and dignity, and in very few instances have given cause for complaint. The three divisions of this class command entrée to all social functions at the Royal Palace. The next, or merchant class, moves in a set all its own, and, as a general rule, holds aloof from the court faction. Their ambitions are chiefly political, and, with the exception of a few eminent artists, authors, sculptors, and musicians they are little before the public eye. No more enthusiastic or loyal subjects of the Emperor can be found in the dual-monarchy than this merchant-class, but the majority of the court-minions are held by them in abject scorn. The last, or the



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ruling class, in reality, constitute the real bone and sinew of the nation. Rights were accorded by a wise Monarch; they were not forced to demand them. They could enter the Palace, and, after a few brief words with the chamberlain, could claim audience with the sovereign. They shake his hand on festive days and the children throw flowers in his path; they look on the court, not with envy, but with a kind of awe; they feel a sense of pride in the knowledge that they uphold the ruler and the army, and, with him they look forward to a time when they shall be Lords of their portion of the world.

The masses have their favorites among the ruling factions, too. Both Auzens and Atholians united in reverential love and respect for Baron von Bertrom. Both Auzens and Atholians held deep in their hearts a sort of paralytic fear of Count Van Hellick. In the nineteen years that he had served the old Emperor, and the old Emperor's son, he had never set foot on Atholian soil. This was a source of grievance to both countries. Two other names were much esteemed, and one name was held in profound contempt: the Cardinal was almost as greatly beloved as the ruler, and Count Bracken was rapidly growing in popularity; but Antonio Wiebenovitch was heartily detested by all three classes.

And so the manifestation of intimacy between Antonio and Nacoli drew unwelcome attention to the Russian. The two were constantly in each other's society, and, just before the Palace ball, an incident occurred that set the town agog.

In the Hohenstauffenn dining-room, the usual throng of nobility, globe-trotters, and merchant-princes, were at their respective tables; one of the private dining-rooms was cut off from the crowd by

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heavy portières through which penetrated the chatter of the outsiders and the brilliant orchestral music. Lights, flowers, the rooms, and the table appointments were the quintessence of fashion; in fact, one could lean back comfortably in his chair, listening to a selection from some famous opera, and straightway imagine himself in Vienna. The service was certainly as good as that at the Hotel V——, thought the Grand Duke, and the women, seen in the café were as admirably gowned as the Parisians. Auzenburg was not such an out-of-the-world place after all.

Wiebenovitch quaffed his champagne with evident satisfaction; his head slightly tilted back, and a delicately rolled cigarette was between his teeth. Opposite him, sat a portly middle-aged man of fair complexion, snowy side-whiskers and wine-flushed cheeks. From the conversation, which had at first taken a political turn, he was evidently a person of affairs, and, no less a person, as development proved, than Archduke Wimer, the Emperor's cousin, and the petty ruler of the Duchy, which, in exactly four days' time would pass to Cozhurst in heir of six-million crowns (unless a loan could be secured from some unlooked-for source).

Archduke Wimer was as boisterous as he was in-temperate. The wine rendered him loquacious; his mind reverted to Vienna and his favorite haunts; Babette and Elsie, favorites of the ballet were remembered in numerous toasts. The Secretary was alert; he gained much choice political gossip from this source. Where and how a man of the Archduke's rank had fallen under his influence is one of those inexplicable mysteries. Nacoli had watched with evident disgust, the Archduke quench his seemingly in-

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satiable thirst, but, when the cigarettes were ashes, and the Secretary had mentioned the hour, a sudden impulse seized Nacoli, and, re-filling his glass he sprang up, holding it aloft, watching the iridescent ripple of bubbles rise and fall upon the surface.

Meanwhile, the Emperor, having learned by accident that his cousin was at the Hohenstauffenn, ordered his motor, and, taking Lieutenant von Wieben with him, had driven to the hotel and sent the aide in to summon Wimer.

Von Wieben was admitted in the midst of Nacoli's remarks, and either the Russian's words or surprise at recognizing Wimer's companions bereft him of speech.

"You may toast your fair ones," said Nacoli, "your glorious pink and white Austrian beauties——"

"Babette's hair is as black as night."

The interruption passed unnoticed and Nacoli continued—"The Titian types, with their splendid auburn tresses, but, for me, there is a woman—the fairest of the fair. When you look into her eyes, you forget their color—you only know that they are wonderful, fathomless pools. Her brow and cheek are alabaster, and her lips—the sweetest lips in Christendom—are the burning crimson of poppy-petals."

"Enough! enough! cried Wimer, raising his goblet "toast Babette no more!—but who is this superb beauty—this Flora—Aphrodite—?" Unsteadily he swayed to his feet, grasping the back of a chair for support.

"She is——" the Grand-Duke paused impressively. "The Grand-Duchess Nacoli—that is to be. Will you not join me?"

"But her name—her name?" Wimer thumped the table boisterously.

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"Cecil Huntington—the English maiden who saved your Emperor's life—the most lovable, hard-hearted, tender, wilful, perverse coquette this side of the seas. Hers are the fairest lips to kiss, the dearest hands to caress—may she make a good and obedient wife!"

Wimer's eyes fell on the aide-de-camp. "Join us Lieutenant. What sir-r? You refuse? Perhaps you are in love with her—With Cecil Huntington."

"I can not——" the Aide began hotly.

"What, you insolent knave—you——" Wimer was just enough intoxicated to construe the young officer's refusal into a personal insult. He leaned forward, intending to strike the Aide, but, in his clumsiness, missed him, and nearly upset the table.

At that moment, a man sprang between the Aide and the Archduke and dealt the Russian a furious blow.

Ferdinand's face was livid with anger, and his eyes blazed in fury.

"Who are you, Sir?" Nacoli demanded thickly. "Who are you, that you strike a man of my rank?"

"I am the Emperor."

With an exclamation the Grand Duke stepped back.

The Emperor's hand unconsciously sought his sword hilt. "You need not flinch, you cur," he said quickly, noticing the pallor which was overspreading the Russian's face. "I shall not strike you again now, though you deserve it. To-morrow—if you do not retract those lies—I hope to choke them down your dastardly throat——"

Though he had paled, Nacoli was no coward. He drew himself up proudly. "I have nothing to retract."

"Then you must fight," cried the Emperor, and

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snatching his gauntlet from his hand, he threw it at the Grand Duke's feet.

"When and where you will," Nacoli answered boldly. "Had I a sword——"

"Otto—your rapier!" The Emperor snatched the weapon from Von Wieben and flung it after the glove. Ferdinand had taken a step forward and it seemed for one fleeting instant that fists instead of steel would settle the matter. Whether through fear or purposely, Wiebenovitch stumbled against the table. China, silver, and candles crashed to the polished floor, and, in their wake, several potted plants—the din was deafening.

"Gott und Himmel! Gott und Himmel!" shrieked the excited proprietor. Summoned by the uproar, he saw his sovereign with drawn sword facing a foreigner, wine glasses shattered upon the floor, and chairs overturned.

"Kaiser, my God!" cried the Aide aroused at last, "not now—not here, for Heaven's sake!"

It is strange what demons jealousy makes of some of us. Since morning the canker had been eating into the Emperor's heart. Stubbornly, all day, he had striven to banish the maddening doubts that insistently entered his mind—all day, he had again and again thrust them aside, and had almost succeeded in convincing himself that he was over-hasty, when the Russian blackguard brought the demons back in overwhelming force. Every line of that abominable peace-destroying, anonymous letter, which had come to his hand that morning, was vividly recalled: "What do you know of this so-called English lady who saved your life? Have you ever noticed the striking likeness to her brother? Ask her if she has ever lived in Canada. Accept this

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warning from one who has your welfare at heart. It is said that she is betrothed to a certain Russian noble whose name, no doubt is familiar to you. What changes position can make! Your rank is a step higher than his—unfortunate Prince! Beware lest you find your idol made of clay. Put not your trust in an adventuress!"

The Emperor had received anonymous letters before—many of them concerning his personal habits, some seeking to prejudice him against certain officials, others containing threats of personal violence. The missives had all met their just deserts—the waste basket; this one, however, he had kept, in the hope of discovering the sender.

At last in response to the entreaties of those about him, he became somewhat calm. The proprietor was pleading, almost tearfully, for a truce. The name of his hostelry—his reputation, would be ruined forever; and he could not bear the thought that his sovereign's blood might be spilt within his house. He almost apologized for his hasty guest, indicating, supplicatingly, the empty champagne bottles. Nacoli brushed him aside contemptuously and addressed the Emperor:

"Tis evident, this is no place to settle our difficulty. I do not know your city—if you can suggest a place of meeting—name the hour—"

"To-morrow at sunrise at Zilberfenn," said the Emperor, mechanically taking the rapier the Grand Duke presented. Choose your second. Otto can complete any arrangements with your representative."

To the evident surprise of the little group, the Aide hastily demurred. "Act as second for your Majesty! Sire—Sire, can you not settle this without

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blood? My faith, I should not be true to the oaths I have sworn, I should not be loyal to my king, if I were to do this. Stand by and see you wounded or slain! Banish me if you will, but I must refuse to obey, this time."

Here, Archduke Wimer chimed in. The Secretary had slunk out in the turmoil, and the proprietor now retreated to the entrance and held the door against curious intruders drawn hither by the uproar. Otto nervously bent together the hilt and point of his recovered rapier.

Wimer was surprisingly sober. "Gott, though I'm not wanting to see blood spilt, Fritz—if you must fight it out, there's no reason, Otto and I shouldn't see fair play. I'll be second to the Grand Duke.

It was arranged that Otto should accompany the Emperor, and the Archduke attend the Russian to the rendezvous. Duelling was strictly against the Auzen law. There was a clause somewhere in the constitution which said that—"Any offender, of whatever rank or station, should be dealt with according to the foregoing clause," and the foregoing clause contained some very drastic statements about banishment for life, and confiscation of property.

Zilberfenn was an ideally isolated place for such an encounter. A rapier as a general rule is the weapon best known to the hand of the Old World, but realizing from the Emperor's actions that he must be a good blade, Nacoli chose revolvers, and designated "thirty feet." Nacoli's bravado and cool insolence of manner had won the admiration of Archduke Wimer. The latter had seen many such incidents in the former Emperor's day, when duelling restrictions were unknown. A lady's name, a flower, a misplaced confidence, a careless word, were cause

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sufficient, among the young nobles, for a duel. He had often sighed for the return of the laxity and easy-going freedom of the old court.

For his part, Nacoli was nursing a burning cheek as well as rage and hatred. There was little solace to be found in the Archduke's chatter. Archduke Wimer seemed an expert judge of weapons, adored a real fight, and let slip the information that his Royal cousin was a dead shot, also, he had studied sword play under the best masters in Southern Europe. However, the mask-ball was soon to open, and Nacoli exclaimed with a nonchalant wave of the hand: "Fly, Care; come Revelry! We go to the Fairy Queen's court once more. Let the dawn take care of itself!"

The city clock had chimed out the hour of nine when Otto and the Emperor arrived at the Palace. The great doors of the throne-room and the ball-room were already flung wide, and the first strains of music arose and swelled into the corridors. All was hurry and bustle; heralds and pages rushed to their respective places; for the first time in three centuries a court fool jingled his bells along the main corridor through which the guests would pass. Master Fool had some frivolous greeting for each newcomer, and his sharp eye penetrated all disguises with but two exceptions—one a diminutive figure completely swathed in yellow—(a woman doubtless). the other one was tall and dignified in appearance, the identity thoroughly obscured behind crimson mask and robe. The jester, for some reason, was regretful that there would be no unmasking. His curiosity was aroused.

We are inclined to disbelieve Love is blind, for Marie a silver mask and the Emperor in costume of



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the former Emperor Hadred soon found each other. He was still seething under the jealousy and dislike which had prompted the squabble a short time before. Almost beside himself he took Marie to task for her conduct toward Nacoli; showed her the anonymous letter in his possession, and first implored, then demanded, she should forbid Nacoli to again visit the Embassy. Marie could not promise this, for the old Ambassador's sake, and sharp words followed. At first she was almost inclined to throw her masquerade to the winds—then something stayed her. "Let him wait till the first of November," she concluded, "Surely he can trust me till then." But the Emperor, jealous as he was, was in no humor to wait for anything.

The red-mask over heard their conversation and gloried in the girl's refusal to forbid the Russian access to her home. The red mask which had baffled the Fool obscured the visage of Nacoli.

The Emperor and Marie had been in the conservatory, and it was there she left him to think and brood alone.

### **XI.**

#### **THE YELLOW MASK.**

Marie's abrupt flight from the Emperor was checked in a startling manner on reaching the conservatory door which opened upon the marble terraces. A portly mask in peasant costume seized her arm.

"At last!" came a man's voice in unmistakably German accents. "Let us return to the Embassy; I

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have already made our excuses to the Queen. Von Berewin is waiting with your wraps on the terrace—come!”

“You have made a mistake,” gasped the silver mask. (Von Berewin was the well-known first secretary of the Austrian Embassy.)

Mystified, but quickly aware of his error the moment the girl spoke, the peasant released her, murmuring apologies. The silver mask vanished across the moon-lit terrace into the gardens.

Marie glanced back, once or twice, to see if she were followed but no one was in sight. Had the Emperor remained where she left him? She smiled a little sadly. Ah well! on Saturday, he would understand—then would he forgive?

Thus questioning herself, she paid no heed to her steps until the moonlight revealed a long black object, directly in her path, which proved to be the hedge of prickly evergreens that separated the Palace grounds from those of the Archbishop. Nervously, the girl surveyed her surroundings—the lights of the Palace were obscured by countless cedar trees; the lake lay, clear and silvery, scarcely a dozen yards from her. Beside the hedge a stone seat invited wanderers, and after one more glance, she sank down upon it, resting her elbows upon her knees and her chin on her interwoven fingers.

What had Nacoli done to arouse such hatred in the Emperor?

The sound of foot-steps made her startle and sit erect. With straining eyes, she scanned the walk, but, in an instant realized that the strollers were on the farther side of the hedge. Nerveless again, she resumed her former position, and waited. The sound of voices was borne to her ears—a woman’s

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mellow tones mingling with the deeper voice of a man. The merry heel-taps paused, and the man's words were distinctly audible.

"Here is a seat, Ma Chère—an ideal spot for plans and plots, under the soft rays of the moon."

"Since you have brought me here for plotting and to hear important news, we may as well take advantage of this isolated place—at all events it is more nearly safe than the Palace."

"Speak low. The Chancellor's ears are everywhere to-night," said her companion. "Old fool—to believe us so unsuspecting. He considers himself a match for the sharpest brains of Europe."

Marie had sprung up, intending to return to the Palace, but the last phrase held her rooted to the spot. The woman's voice was strangely familiar.

"In a few days' time," the mellow voice repeated, "surely a loan will be offered before the first—a loan which will be acceptable. The Emperor rejects all loans with Princesses attached? I wonder if he thinks to wed *her*?"

The man laughed shortly. "The Ministers are desperate, but what can they do? You know enough already to guard another secret—has it ever occurred to you that Cozhurst may have some support—a mightier power——?"

"That has been common talk," breathlessly—"of course it is Austria."

"Austria," he repeated scornfully, "Austria has another pot to boil."

"You have led me to believe this till now."

"Well, since the crisis is so near, you must know better. The diplomats, here, have jumped to that conclusion—they can not see farther than their noses. The people do not want the Austrian Ludwig to be

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the next Emperor, and small wonder, as he would be, more or less a puppet—neither would they desire any other foreign prince, but no feeling of enmity for ‘the Raven’ has been evinced until this affair of the triple alliance. Immediately after Queen Louise’s coronation, Cozhurst withdrew—this action ought to indicate clearly that Austria is not behind her, for the Prince Consort is an Austrian as you know. Auzenburg, no doubt, will be unable to pay Cozhurst her six million crowns, and the Duchy will be handed over at once, as agreed, but mind, it will not remain in Cozhurst’s power. King Lois—rest his soul!—made a bargain all his own with Turkey. You know this Duchy is the Gibraltar of this country. Well he, for the use of the Sultan’s troops, in international squabbles, had made a contract to present Turkey with the prize. Not publicly, however; Turkey was ostensibly to seize it, and Cozhurst was not to resist. Queen Louise has endeavored, by every means possible, to break the agreement, but the document holds her firmly to it. Needless to say, the Sultan is inexorable.”

Marie gave a little gasp. She like the others had thought “Austria.”

A horrified exclamation followed. “Turkey!” The woman’s voice held a note of dread. “Would that I had never entered into this dreadful complication. Do you realize what my country underwent during those years of Moslem sway? Do you think, I have no conscience? Austria, I could consider with less quaking, for we belong partly to her soil. This, then, is the scheme of drawing Auzenburg again into her clutches? By this manoeuvre, Turkey thrusts herself into the very heart of our land. Cozhurst also will become a prey to the will of the Sublime Porte

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—powerless to prevent the deposing of her Queen and the division of her land into principalities. The Sultan's heel will be upon our necks again! Oh Heaven, what an outlook! If the Emperor knew—if Ferdinand knew——”

“Hush!” said the man harshly. A stifled sob of anguish broke the silence. “Why should you care,” he inquired in softened voice, “you will not suffer. Remember you are to share my reward—you will wear a principality's crown.”

The woman sighed despairingly. “You spoke of official papers——”

“Yes,” he answered quickly, “you will copy the letter and documents as speedily as possible—I do not wish to leave the Palace yet. Ma Chère, our reward must come—whatever happens. These documents are priceless. If the slightest harm happen to them—well, it may cost my head.”

“What are these priceless documents?”

He laughed evasively. “You will learn soon enough. The letter is from—well from one in a position to offer assistance. I believe, some scheme may be afoot to back Bulgaria and Auzenburg in the war. Austria is determined to gain those provinces and if the two countries fly at Turkey's throat, the attention of the Powers will be averted from ‘the Raven’ until too late to interfere. If Austria offers her reserves—well it is my mission at present to learn just where Austria stands. Be careful that the copies, you make, are exact—the war may turn upon the news they carry——”

“What was that? I thought, I heard some one speak,” interrupted the woman in alarm. Silence, for a time; the two were listening; then, the man resumed. “Conscience does make a coward of one—

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I wish yours, you would trammel under foot. It was merely the lapping of the water. I had an experience to-night—an experience with the Emperor that made me desolate. Diable! but he has a temper.” The man proceeded to relate every detail of the hotel quarrel. Marie stood and pressed her hands to her throbbing temples. Was she to stand powerless, even effortless, and leave these two to plot and plan and carry out their treason?

Nacoli and the man she loved, to fight. Ah, Heaven! But listen, the man said the Auzen Chancellor would see to it that no duel would take place. Relief. She felt a throb of thankfulness toward the Iron-Handed Van Hellick.

“Is it not time, you were getting the papers?” the woman inquired suddenly. “The air is growing chilly, and I protest against your keeping me longer under the moon.”

“If the Emperor is as careless as usual, I can get hold of the papers in about one hour. I have a letter to get also—it will be no trouble. You can meet me here at twelve?”

“Unless unforeseen circumstances prevent.”

“Tres bien then, till twelve. You must have the copies in as short time as possible, remember. A long absence on my part will be remarked, for there are those here who know me—but you are safe. They will never be wiser.”

Marie was filled with a sudden desire to part the bushes and tell the plotters that they had been overheard, but she saw that this was impossible—she must think of some shrewd plan, if she would save the papers of the Emperor. Quickly, she lightly mounted the bench, and secure in the friendly shadow

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of the trees, gazed down upon the Arch Bishop's side of the garden.

Two fantastic figures were clearly revealed by the moon light—a slender woman in a costume of Emperor Hadred's time, that, in the white light, appeared grey as a dove's wing; by the woman's side, stood a mask in vivid yellow with a toll cap much the shape of a steeple. The two plotters departed in opposite directions, and Marie sprang to the ground on her side.

The girl's first impulse was to hasten to the British Ambassador, but a moment's reflection convinced her that would never do. She could not put such information into the hands of the British government. Oh, if she could find Count Bracken! What mask covered that kindly handsome face? And the Emperor—her heart sank. It was too late to search for him. If he had only followed her! The papers must be saved at any cost and the Emperor informed of the treasonable conversation. But how to accomplish these purposes? Never in her young life, had she so longed for a comrade—for Harold, dauntless, resourceful Harold. What a moment! She was besieged by doubt, beset by fear. What shall I do?" she thought and wrung her hands. Suddenly, an inspiration came. Stepping into the moonshine, she gazed at her costume. It appeared not silver, but grey—a sparkling pale thing, all white and blue and dove-colored as she moved. With an exclamation of delight, she turned toward the wall of evergreens. Surely, there must be an opening into the Cardinal's gardens, near at hand; she followed the route of the hedge a short distance and came upon the desired gate.

Without doubt, one or the other of the conspirators

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would reach the trysting-place before the appointed time, and, in all probability, the first comer would be the man. If he found Marie waiting, he would likely give her the papers mistaking her for his confederate. Marie prayed that the woman might be detained. Finding the bench, recently occupied by the conspirators, she sat down to wait, and to think over all she had heard. "Ah, Ferdinand," she mused, "now, I know why you hate Nacoli. Had you told me of the hotel incident instead of frightening me so with that detestible letter. 'I can not—I will not tolerate a rival'," she repeated his words softly. "How like the hot, fiery, Auzen temper!"

The very possibility of a duel, made her shudder. The conspirators were familiar with the Court. Where, Marie asked herself, had she heard that woman's voice previous to this night. Believing that Nacoli's boasts had been inspired by wine, she disdained anger. Why had not the Emperor made allowance for Nacoli's condition, and paid no further attention to the matter? Who could have been with Nacoli and the Archduke Wimer at the hotel? Men reach conclusions by reasoning, women, by intuition. Strange but true it is, women are rarely led astray by this seventh sense. Wiebenovitch had the confidence of Nacoli or Nacoli would never have brought him to call that day; no one was in a position to know so thoroughly the Emperor's private and political affairs. Intuition assured her that the yellow mask was no other than Wiebenovitch and no power could shake this assurance. His words had told volumes—he was thoroughly familiar with the Court, the statesmen, the trend of political affairs, and he was, apparently, a friend of Nacoli. He had wit-



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nessed the affair at the hotel, and he was a political spy—a spy in the employ of *Turkey*.

A foot-fall sounded upon the walk. Marie was alert and anxious, but gradually, the steps died in the distance and no one appeared. Marie decided that the yellow mask either had not had time to return or failed to secure the desired documents.

The minutes stole on; after a seeming eternity the clock struck twelve.

The girl was in a fever of impatience, and had about decided to return to the Palace when, from the shrubbery at her side, a man emerged. He hesitated an instant, then, apparently assured that the figure on the marble bench was his former companion, he spoke:

"You have been waiting, Ma Belle? Peste! I thought I could never come."

Marie arose in silence and crossed the path to his side.

"I have the papers, he said triumphantly, as he drew a thin package from under his cape. "Return them to me as soon as possible—I shall wait for you."

Eagerly the girl seized the papers, while she burned with an almost unconquerable desire to discover the name of the man before her. An idea, as daring as it was dangerous, flashed into her mind. If she should blunder, all would be lost.

"*Oui, certainement, Antonio.*" Quivering at her own audacity, she prayed that instinct and impulse had led her aright.

"Peste! Ma Charmante, the night has ears," he cautioned, laughing uneasily. "Hurry along or you will catch your death of cold—you are shivering now."

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About a half hour later the yellow mask was startled by hurrying steps, and a slender figure in grey came up with breathless haste.

"I am sorry I was detained," she panted. The Emperor was searching for Miss Huntington and being misled by the likeness of our costumes, insisted on detaining me. I thought I should never be rid of him. Where are the papers?"

The Secretary sprang to his feet. "Where are the papers? Did I not give them to you just now?"

"You certainly did not—I have not seen them," she answered.

"You have not seen them! Oh, bon Dieu! who has them? To whom did I give them?"

After some persuasion, the woman learned what had happened, "This is a nice outcome," she cried angrily, "I suppose to-night's escapade will send us both to the tower."

She wore the same kind of costume you are wearing," groaned the dejected and terrified Italian.

"Bah!" she cried, stamping her foot, "Miss Huntington's was silver; mine is grey, and the Austrian Ambassador's wife wears both grey and silver—so there you are! If they fell into Austrian hands, they will be turned over to Count Bracken in the morning."

## **XII.**

### **THE DUEL.**

Rose pink, as a hybrid tea of the garden, morning came. The Bläusee, stretching between banks of grass fast changing from velvety green to the brown

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and yellow of Autumn, reflected the tender hue of the sky. St. Marienbaumen's ivy-grown, lichen-covered towers loomed against the snow-capped Transylvanians, like two great giants keeping guard over a sleeping city. The first breath of Winter had chilled the air.

Van Hellick had been refused an interview with the Emperor the night before. Ferdinand guessed that the Chancellor had learned something of the duel and intended employing urgent means to prevent it. Otto communicated this turn of affairs to Archduke Wimer and the meeting-place was changed. A mile farther into the Silber Wald was thought a sufficient move to baffle the Chancellor.

Half an hour before day-break, Archduke Wimer quitted his apartments at the Hohenstauffenn; after arousing the men in charge of the garage, unattended drove out his electric machine. The Grand Duke soon joined him, and, a few moments later, they left the city.

"I fear," said Wimer, "that we shall be a trifle late, as, at two o'clock, Otto woke me to say, we must journey a mile farther into the forest. Fritz is always on hand to the second; he hates tardiness. Otto also said that the court physician would accompany them—Shuber is about the only one trusted to keep his tongue."

Meanwhile the sleeping inmates of the Royal Palace were blissfully unconscious of the opening and closing of doors and the echoing footsteps along the corridors. Three figures, muffled beyond recognition, stole silently forth into the morning—mounted and rode away. Of the three men, Ferdinand was calmest; Otto was uneasy; and Baron Shuber was positively benumbed by fear. The Emperor calmly

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inquired about the revolvers and the number of shots to be exchanged—three rounds had been agreed upon.

Both parties reached the appointed spot about the same time. As chance would have it, the Emperor's horse whirled about and plunged at sight of the car. Otto caught the bridle and held the quivering animal until the rider was safe on the ground. "It bodes havoc for his nerves," thought Otto; what possessed the beast—now of all times!"

Wimer waved them a greeting from his seat. The horses were tethered in a cluster of young birch, and the party came together. The Emperor bore himself proudly and coolly; the Grand Duke, with the sneering, arrogant effrontery that had characterized him before.

Otto and Wimer tossed for positions—Wimer won. Weapons were carefully inspected and given into the hands of the combatants.

"Sire, my God! if either of you must fall——" murmured Otto as he fingered the gleaming steel. Wimer had retreated to his post. The state physician sat upon a nearby log, having been seized by a sudden weakness in the knees. "Are you ready?"

"Yes—ready," simultaneously.

"One—two—three! Fire!"

It was all done and over so quickly that the on-lookers hardly realized what had happened. The first round the Emperor's weapon missed fire, and Nacoli's bullet grazed Ferdinand's cheek. Sharply the Emperor commanded reloading. Then it was that the Russian's splendid nerve gave way a little. He understood that Ferdinand meant to kill. The second round the Emperor stood holding a smoking revolver, and Nacoli—lay prostrate upon the ground.

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The seconds and the physicians rushed forward. Wimer lifted the Grand Duke, who appeared lifeless. The Emperor threw aside his revolver and came forward; his face was inquiry enough.

The physician shook his head, "He lives—and yet, the heart-beats are very faint. I fear it is fatal."

"How long will he last?" asked the Emperor, bending forward.

"That is hard to say, your Majesty. He must be gotten to some place where good attention can be had—the wound bleeds profusely." The physician set about adjusting temporary bandages; Wimer and Otto held a hasty consultation.

"Let him be taken into the city," directed the Emperor, "and you, Shüber, will attend him."

"That's out of the question, Fritz," broke in Wimer. "If Van Hellick learned of the trouble, others know too, by now. There'll be scandal enough without that. We have decided that it's best to convey him to Wallburg; no one in the town knows the Grand Duke or cares a rap about me; Shüber can accompany us. I shall take them in my car. Otto can go back with you. Time hangs heavily upon my hands—I do not mind seeing the affair through. There's telephone connection, and I'll run into town this evening, so you'll be kept informed of his condition. Do not protest; all that remains to be done is to get him comfortably into the car."

The sight of Nacoli slain, perhaps, by his own hand, had dazed the Emperor. Moodily he watched the car brought forward and Nacoli lifted in; Shüber followed.

"Don't brood too much, Fritz," advised Wimer before putting on his goggles. "He may live, after all."

Side by side, Otto and the Emperor watched the

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car turn into the woodland road and disappear in the opposite direction from the capital. Silently, Otto untethered and brought up the horses. Just as they were about to mount, the hurried beat of hoofs sounded around the curve, and, a moment later two horsemen appeared—hatless, breathless, their steeds wet with foam. The Emperor frowned darkly at being recognized. The foremost was Otto's half-brother, Johann von Wieben, Captain of the Palace Guard; the other, white and anxious, was Count Bracken.

"Sire, Sire!" cried the Count, as both flung themselves to the ground. Mein Gott—is it over? Are you wounded?"

The Emperor shook his head. There was no need to make an ado over the slight cut he had received. So the Count and Johann knew? Had the affair spread through the city?

"And the Russian?"

"He is dead—or dying," the Emperor answered. "I have killed him."

Count Bracken caught the Emperor's hand. "Shake it off—this nonsense. If you have killed him, it was in fair fight. Mein Gott, to think it might have been you. Only a few of us know, and our lips are sealed. We know—whatever the cause—you are in the right."

The Emperor returned the hand-clasp of his friend. "How did you learn where to come? I had thought to see Van Hellick——"

"He intended to come, Sire, but had a fall on the Auzenstrasse and sprained his back. He sent for Johann and implored him to interfere——"

"And I awoke Count Bracken, your Majesty, knowing that if we arrived in time, my influence

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could not be so great as his. The Chancellor affirms that only two others at the capital beside himself know—I can not name his informant.”

When they had mounted, the Emperor called Count Bracken to his side, and the half-brothers swung in behind.

“Abominable affair,” Johann said after hearing Otto’s story. “If the Russian die—what in the name of eternity are we to do?”

“I have thought of that,” Otto answered quickly, “but whatever happens we must shield the Emperor. If Nacoli die, I’ll take the duel on myself and, he can formally strip me of rank and banish me. The people know there was a quarrel at the hotel, and they know, too, who were the participants. Wiebenovitch is an alien and too cowardly a fellow to think of any thing but his own safety——”

“But Wimer——” the Captain broke in, overcome by the sacrifice Otto was willing to make.

“He is out of the question, Johann. I am the only one—I can not dwell on the outlook, never to see this land again; but—the Emperor’s honor must be preserved untarnished.”

Count Bracken had mentioned such a plan to the Emperor. “Sire,” he said, “how long our secret can be kept I do not know—if it only were among us four, I could answer for our silence, but—forgive me for saying so—there is some one who is not prudent, intimate with your private affairs and with official matters. Many things, of late, that should be Court secrets have been in the mouths of the people. The best and surest way for this matter to be quieted is for some one to proclaim the duel and give himself up to the authorities——”

“That is not possible, Count,” returned the Em-

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peror with a glance of surprise. The proprietor of the hotel was a witness to our quarrel. Wimer knows, and Otto, and Wiebenovitch."

Count Bracken was not shaken. "The first, your Majesty, will hold his peace. It is lucky so few were witnesses. Pardon my presumption, for I am only seeking to aid you—your name must not be connected with this affair, especially if the Grand Duke should not recover. A house in Vienna and a yearly income would not be a bad bargain. Some show must need be made of punishing the offence."

"Bracken"—the Emperor faced him sharply, "though I value your love for me, I refuse to permit any such subterfuge, as you have suggested. If Nacoli die—I am to blame, and I alone shall bear the brunt. There is not a man with true Auzen blood in his veins, who would have acted differently."

"May I ask a question, your Majesty?"

The Emperor nodded assent.

"Was it over—" He stopped, feeling the delicacy of the subject. Even though Ferdinand accorded him many privileges, exclusively his own, he hesitated to finish the question.

"Miss Huntington? Yes."

You will not censure me, for I am your Majesty's humble friend," murmured the statesman. "If I could speak unrestrainedly——"

"You have that privilege, Bracken. Do not hesitate. You are my right hand."

The Count plunged headlong into his subject. "The town has supplied the answer to my question—that the altercation was because of the lady. The people have been mad over her beauty and bravery, and, naturally, her name has been linked with yours."



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I believe this excitement has brought on one of Van Hellick's attacks."

"What! You said nothing of this before." Ferdinand was thoroughly startled.

"All too true, Sire; so much anxiety and exercise early in the morning proved his master. Doubtless, he will be forced to keep his bed for a day or two."

Events never come singly. The Emperor began to realize what this madness was costing. Notwithstanding his innumerable tilts with 'Iron Mask,' he had a genuine affection for the old man and the news of his illness moved him deeply.

"Bracken," he exclaimed suddenly, "I hope, earnestly, that Nacoli may recover—he has had his lesson. If Fate had ordained that I should fall by his hand, he would have flown the country without the slightest qualm. I did only what any honorable man would do in defense of the woman he loves. A thought has been urging itself upon me of late—abdication. At first, for the country's sake, I fought against the bare suggestion, but fighting has done no good. I owe you and my Ministers a confidence, which soon or late, I must impose—I have asked Miss Huntington to be my wife."

Count Bracken evinced little surprise. He had been expecting such a declaration, and had weighed the consequences from every point of view.

Ferdinand continued, "If Nacoli does not recover, all I can do is to explain all to the Czar. Our duelling laws can not be broken even by me; therefore if the physician does not telephone a favorable report, a meeting of the cabinet must be called at once."

Count Bracken was much agitated, "Any thing but abdication, your Majesty!" he cried. "The nation will never consent to that. The duel was not of your

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seeking; the Russian insulted you; every man, be he King or peasant, possesses the right, nay, the duty, to defend his honor or the honor of those dear to him; there are cases with which the law can not deal. As for Miss Huntington—I am not going to urge you to live for Auzenburg alone. I want to see you happy, even at the cost of the country's pride. Mind, I am not encouraging you, one way or the other, but I know you are not changeable. All I can say is that if you are determined to marry Miss Huntington—in any stand you take, you have my steadfast support. I shall do my uttermost to influence my colleagues."

They had entered the city, and, again, Bracken spoke hurriedly. "Sire, Van Hellick is mad with anxiety, I know. Will you not see him and satisfy him that you are unhurt."

The Emperor assented; "We have spent three quarters of an hour on the road—first let us go to the 'Public works' and call Wallburg."

The Count and Emperor dismounted and entered the Ministry building. Soon telephone connection was established and Baron Shüber, summoned to answer the call. The Emperor experienced a sudden sinking of the heart as the physician's voice grew audible.

"I recognize your voice—no need to use names. I called the Palace scarcely a minute ago, but you had not arrived. The patient is doing nicely, nicely. From the extraordinary flow of blood I anticipated an immediate collapse, but, thanks to his splendid physique, the wound will not prove fatal. He will be about in a few days."

"Thank Heaven," exclaimed the Emperor fervently. A great weight seemed lifted from his shoul-

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ders. After intrusting their horses to the aide, the Emperor and Count Bracken proceeded on foot to Van Hellick's residence. Bracken held no malice toward "Iron Mask" though realizing the feeling, the latter evinced toward him.

The Physician had forbidden visitors to the Chancellor, though he was resting easily—yes sleeping. So the Emperor left a note to reassure Van Hellick concerning his safety. Feeling gratified at the news received in both cases the Emperor and Count Bracken made their way to the Palace. Neither had thought of hunger until their arrival, but, with the ebbing of anxiety, came a consciousness of fatigue. They breakfasted together, and later, departed to the Council Hall, where the Diet was concerned over the proximity of war.

That a nation so large and prosperous as Auzenburg should find herself in such financial straits, was due to the enormous expense of the equipment and maintenance of an unusually large army. While meeting the public expenses, fifteen million crowns had been saved towards liquidation of the debt to Austria—on the first of October fifteen million crowns had been contributed by vote of the people—thus Austria was to be satisfied, but the debt to Cozhurst remained and as the dreaded first of November drew near, a wave of restlessness swept the nation. The foreign ministers believed something behind the apparently untroubled Auzen statesmen, and watched the daily army maneuvers, the departing of troops for the border, and the increase of Cuirassiers, with no little anxiety.

Let us glance, for a moment, at the outside world. Bulgaria, boldly had declared her independence of Turkey; and Turkey, early in October, had asked the

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Powers to respect the treaty of Berlin; Servia immediately called out army reserves; England openly refused to recognize the right of any Power to break a treaty; Turkey loudly protested against the annexation of the provinces, Bosnis and Herzegovina, by Austria, as a violation of her rights; the foreign Ministers of Russia and Italy made imprudent statements concerning the knowledge and sanction of the Balkan coupe of their respective governments. Turkey denied that war preparations were going on, but continued to distribute ammunition and supplies; Germany held her tongue.

A pretty kettle of fish! Servia had ample ground for complaint as the people of the provinces are Servians, and this complication would mean a hemming-in by Austria on the West; certainly, Turkey did not relish the idea of Bulgaria in control of the Eastern Roumelian railway.

Later, Servia clamors for war with Austria; Russia threatens to send forces into Bulgaria; Turkey continues to mobilize troops; and Bulgaria stands firm.

Auzenburg in the midst of the squabble, harassed by debts, afire with excitement—like her neighbors—makes ready for the struggle. Auzenburg did not hate Austria; her people simply did not relish the thought of any foreign puppet on the throne. If Bulgaria were forced into war with Turkey, Auzenburg meant to join forces with the former. She had known the despotism of Moslem bondage, and the detestable memories were never to be forgotten.

And those at the helm of State! Was not all this enough? Yet, the Chancellor was threatened with paralysis, the Emperor had been a participant in a

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duel, and seemed determined to marry a woman far beneath him in rank.

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The morning passed unusually quiet at the Palace. The two half-brothers saw little of each other until noon. After luncheon, however, when the men had re-gathered in the Guards' Hall, Otto and Johann sat down near the great fire place, at one end of the room. Johann was worried: "What in eternity am I going to do with so many new men? and yet, it is necessary to have them." He glanced down the length of the hall at the little groups of well known faces. "Three hundred guardsmen arrived from the Duchy to-day, and three hundred more are coming. Last night, two thousand Hussars left the city for the Turkish border——"

Somewhere, a telephone bell rang violently, and almost simultaneously a soldier saluted the Captain. "The Court physician wishes to speak either to Captain or Lieutenant von Wieben."

Both men hastened into the ante-chamber. Johann answered the call. Otto, impatiently waiting, saw the other's face grow pale, and an instant later, he flung the receiver on its hook.

"Otto—Grand Duke Nacoli is dead."

For moments, they stared into space; then Johann squared his shoulders, "The Emperor must know at once."

"Yes," said Otto dully, "the Emperor must know."

Hurriedly Johann left the Palace and made his way to the Council Hall. But, there, he was informed that he would be compelled to wait—the Emperor was too busy to be disturbed. Johann could not believe that the message had been delivered and

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cursed the varlet soundly, but to no effect. The attendant had been instructed to admit no one, and stolidly refused entrance to the Captain. Johann flung himself into a chair to wait as best he could.

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Meanwhile Otto had gone to the police headquarters, and demanded a conference with the Préfet. He was admitted into a smoky, paper-littered apartment, where he found that important personage and two assistants to whom Otto made known the purpose of his visit in a brief and startling manner.

"I, Otto von Wieben, have killed Grand Duke Ivan Nacoli in a duel. You will find his body at the inn at Wallburg. I demand to be taken before the Emperor at once; he is in the Council Hall."

A hasty conference was held; the chief reluctantly placed the young man under arrest, and reluctantly consented to send him, under guard, to the Emperor.

In the audience room, the Ministers had risen, from their respective seats; alone, at one end of the polished table, sat the Emperor, his brow puckered in thought.

An attendant entered and noiselessly crossed the floor. "May I deliver a message to your Majesty?" he asked tremulously, and, receiving the Royal consent, said, "Lieutenant von Wieben brings important news from Wallburg."

"Admit him," said the Emperor; "Bracken," addressing the Minister of Finance, "gather at that end of the room and decide—I leave the matter entirely to your vote. We can not remain neutral."

Otto entered attended by two gendarmes whose sabers glistened fiercely. Surprised beyond measure, the Emperor demanded:

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"What does this mean?"

Otto fell on his knee for an instant; then he arose to his full height, his head proudly erect, his eyes steadfastly meeting his sovereign's. His words, clear, and distinctly spoken, were heard by all. Involuntarily every face was turned in his direction.

"Your Majesty, Grand Duke Ivan Nacoli is dead. I killed him in a duel. I have given myself up to the authorities, and await your pleasure."

Stunned, the Emperor could only stare. Had he heard aright? Had Otto gone mad? This state of affairs would never do. Otto should not bear the consequences of Nacoli's death. Ah, the faithful Aide had thought to condemn himself irrevocably by announcing his guilt before the Ministers. The Emperor sprang up, and motioned to the gendarmes, "I demand Lieutenant von Wieben's instant release. If Ivan Nacoli is dead, this officer is not to blame."

The door at the far end of the apartment flew open and Captain von Wieben appeared. Seeing Otto and the gendarmes, he at once comprehended the situation. He, too, rushed forward and fell to his knee as Otto had done an instant before. "Your Majesty," he cried excitedly, "Grand Duke Nacoli's wound did not prove fatal. He met his death by poison."

Excitement followed excitement. Scarcely had Captain von Wieben explained the telephone message from the physician, when Archduke Wimer stamped into the audience chamber. Count Bracken suggested that the Ministers withdraw, but the Emperor commanded all to remain. "There is nothing which the world should not hear," he asserted, intending to right the wrong, Otto had done himself.

Wimer wiped his brow as he divested himself of

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his cloak, "Since I must speak before you all, I'll begin at the beginning;" the Emperor nodded. Wimer nervously rubbing his hands, addressed himself to the Emperor. "You know, your Majesty, I never was any hand at nursing the sick, so the physician had the weight of care, however, I have kept an eye on the Grand Duke. As soon as possible, we got him to the Inn, and, summoning another doctor, the two made an examination—the ball had gone deep enough to cause trouble, but both stated that, under no condition could it prove fatal. The sick man was apparently in perfect physical condition, and, the physicians commented on his remarkable physique. The wound was bandaged—linen, salves, and knife were flawless, a hypodermic was administered, and soon unmistakable signs of life began to manifest themselves. The Grand Duke revived, asked where he was, and what chances he had; he appeared jubilant on learning that the loss of blood was the worst part of his misfortune, and soon fell into a quiet sleep. The town physician returned home, and we went to luncheon, feeling satisfied that all was well. Here is the shape of the room;" Wimer indicated length and breadth; "the bed is farthest away from the door. A small passage-way leads from the door to the main hall. We left both doors closed. The servants swear that, during our absence, no one was seen to enter or leave the room, except the Grand Duke's valet, who had been wired for. When the physician and I returned, the Russian was apparently in the same position, we had left him. Being time for a draught of medicine, we spoke to him, but he did not respond; the physician touched him on the shoulder, and at once shrieked that the man was dead. I threw open



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a window—the room had been darkened slightly. Nacoli was undoubtedly dead. Dreadful confusion followed; the other physician hastened in, and the *gendarme* was summoned. In the excitement, no one had thought to examine the room. The only suspicious object was the glass, in which medicine had been administered—a few drops of wine were in the bottom of the glass. Both physicians tested the remnant carefully; it was found to contain a deadly drug." Wimer paused, "We searched high and low for the valet, but no trace of him could be found."

During the whole of this dramatic recital, Johann and Otto (already released) stood beside the Emperor's chair, and, as Wimer paused, Otto bent ostensibly to adjust the laces of his boot, "Sire," he whispered imploringly, "for Heaven's sake, let it rest on me—that can do no harm now."

The Court Physician, the *gendarme*, and the Wallburg physician arrived before dusk. Several of the Inn's servants were arrested, and officers were still searching for the missing valet. Little attention was paid to the statement that Otto von Wieben had been one of the duelists. In the last month, wonders had ceased to exist even for "nine days," in Auzenburg. One startling incident crowded out another before the first had time to grow cool; and before noon of the next day, another incident was destined to blot out, for a while even, this horrible tragedy.

The Grand Duke's body was borne into the city with very little ostentation—so little, in fact, that few of the people were aware of the ceremony. The Emperor at once communicated with the Czar, telling, unreservedly, all the known facts, leading to the murder. The request, that Nacoli's remains be sent

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to St. Petersburg, was made; the Russian ruler ignored the duel, but publicly demanded that untiring search be made for the perpetrator of the crime.

### **XIII.**

**"ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT I LOVE YOU."**

"Make me anything you will, but, oh, not a hostess more than three days out of every seven," whispered Lady Ravenswood to Marie as the two stood under the gigantic chandelier in the Embassy drawing-room. "Wednesday!—and I have been receiving every day. There is Alis," and she hastened forward with outstretched hands.

Madame was gowned in splendid saffron, with jewels blazing on her low-cut corsage and sparkling in her hair. Her array of jewels was considerable, and not the least of the precious stones had come from American mines. Her costume was in marked contrast with Alis' gold-embroidered tulle and pearls, and, also, with Marie's filmy gown.

Though Marie's lips smiled her eyes were wistful, nor did the gaiety of the evening chase away the shadow; three people guessed the cause—Madame and Alis and the third was Otto von Wieben who bore the Emperor's excuses.

Marie heard his conversation with Madame, and bit her lips to force the blood to them. Ferdinand had accepted the invitation and now had changed his mind. The rising chagrin ebbed within her as the young aide-de-camp spoke of the Emperor's deep affection for the aged Minister. Ferdinand showed

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respect in foregoing the fête. Marie had heard the story of the duel "between Otto von Wieben and Grand Duke Nacoli," but instinct told her that not Otto, but Otto's master had been one of the participants. Rumor had connected the Emperor's name with the affair, in fact 'twas reported he had announced his complicity, but the ministers had striven to hush up their Monarch's part in it. Then had come the far-away hint of the terrible tragedy at Wallburg. Marie was stunned, at first, by the startling news, but, as soon as the first shock died away, she began to realize the strength of the Emperor's passion for her. How little had she supposed that the talked of duel would take place. Of what could the statesmen been thinking to allow the matter to proceed? One word from her, on the previous night might have averted all—Nacoli might still have lived. Oh, the opportunity that comes no more!

The approach of Otto terminated, for the moment, such morbid reflections; she greeted him pleasantly.

"Count Van Hellick is much improved," he answered to her inquiry. "You know, the Count is far from strong, in spite of his wish to be thought so. The physician refused to let any one see him to-day, even though the Emperor insisted; now, I doubt the Emperor's seeing him before the first of November——"

"Before the first——" she breathed.

Otto looked startled. "Ach! I have 'let the cat out, haven't I, Miss Huntington? But since I've gone this far I'll say more. You are capable of guarding state secrets. To-morrow, he goes to inspect the garrisons on our Northern frontier, and, afterward, a general tour——"

"Oh!" the exclamation was scarcely audible. If

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the Emperor departed to-morrow to be absent until the first day of November, how then was she to put the official papers in his hands? Intrust them to Otto—for an instant she contemplated this, but, no, she must see the Emperor, in person, and tell him the discoveries she had made. Her desire to see Ferdinand came out in a flood.

Otto's lips curled to a smile, under his dark mustaches. He was not unwilling to play aide-de-camp to Master Cupid as well as to the Emperor; he valued her evident trust of him. "By my faith, Miss Huntington," he said, "I would have brought his Majesty here had it been in my power. 'Tis a quarter to twelve now——"

"I must see him," the girl said desperately.

"The only way——" the aide hesitated. "But you would never consent to that."

"Tell me. You do not realize how important it is. Since you have confided to me his intended trip to the garrisons, I will tell you this: Last night put some very important political news in my possession which he must know. As I am a foreigner I might otherwise—but——" she hesitated and color mantled her beautiful face.

"I understand," the aide answered gently. "Miss Huntington, I love him. Please trust me."

"I do trust you," impulsively, "now tell how I may see him."

She startled a little at the aide's suggestion, but why not? She could easily slip away from the gay throng during supper. The utter wildness of the adventure was appalling—to go to the Palace in the company of the aide-de-camp! What if she were recognized by some of the attendants?—but Otto's words set her mind at rest on this score. They would

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row across the lake to the Palace grounds; he knew well the secret door and corridor leading to the Emperor's private library. This was Ferdinand's habitual retreat when no fête demanded his attendance. Supper would be announced at twelve o'clock. He would make his adieus now and wait for the girl at the boat landing.

Marie thought little of the consequences of such an adventure, until Otto had gone, and she could not call him back. How would the Emperor regard her mission? She wished she had dared to summon him to the Embassy, but in spite of his love for her he was still King.

Shortly after Otto's departure, Madame and the Countess drew near.

"I do wish that the Emperor would throw his absurd ideas of duty out of the window, and join us," said Alis ruefully. "It is a shame!"

"You think his absence due entirely to consideration for the Chancellor?" asked Madame.

"Certainly," was the ready response; "No one ever appeared more miserable than he did to-night. He was late at dinner—and usually he is so punctual; the dishes he delights in were scarcely tasted. He appeared feverish, and noticing linen about his throat, I inquired the trouble—he said he had a slight sore throat. However, I asked if he were coming to the reception."

"And what did he say?"

"He was surprised at the question, no doubt. He said he wished to come, but could hardly see his way clear. I told him he usually saw a way to do what he desired, but he said he did not know what he ought to do."

The Servian and Turkish Ministers joined them

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and conversation drifted aimlessly. The suave and civil Austrian greeted the Turkish diplomat as a brother, and smiled placidly upon the wiry Servian, when to-morrow—but who knows the to-morrow?

As Otto quitted the Embassy, he was joined by Captain Johann.

"I have noticed one conspicuous absence to-night, Johann," remarked Otto linking arms with his half-brother.

Johann glanced at him inquiringly.

"Wiebenovitch."

"Humph! don't suppose he is missed," retorted the Captain.

The aide showed his white teeth in a broad smile. "I'll warrant there'll be the devil to pay when the Herr Chancellor recovers. He knows little, yet, of all that has occurred."

"Trouble not yourself on that score—he knows all. He has the eyes of the lynx and the cunning of the fox. I wish some one might out-wit him, just once."

"You have that opportunity to-night, Johann. Baron Shüber was in consultation with Van Hellick's physician this evening, and he said that the Chancellor was raging because he was not allowed to see the Emperor. He believed that the attending physician had not sent the requested message to the Emperor, which, in truth, he had not, and between us, I dare say the Chancellor meant to forestall the Emperor's visit to the British Embassy to-night. Der Kaiser seems to think his duty to the Chancellor holds him at the Palace. Who patrols the Royal terraces at midnight?"

"Arheim. It has been my wont of late to relieve him for an hour or two."

"Then do so to-night, but send him to some dis-

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tant spot. An important messenger goes to the Emperor at midnight—a messenger in my care. The papers stolen the night of the masquerade ball are recovered—the conspirators—or one of them detected. Au revoir—till twelve.”

Captain Johann made good use of the next quarter of an hour. The hand-clasp, he gave Otto at parting, was promise enough of all Otto desired. Arheim was sent on a mission which would require fully an hour's absence, and Johann hummed a tune under his breath, as he paced the shadowy terraces. Adventure had been rife at the court of Utricht. Many the night he had risked Royal favor for the former Emperor's only brother. God rest his soul!

Ah! the dipping of oars broke upon his meditations. A small shadowy object slipped up to the landing and two figures muffled in capes, sprang ashore and made their way toward the palace. After a quick, searching glance, the Captain deliberately turned his back and continued his walk. “Himmel,” he ejaculated to himself, “a woman! Can it be—? Then 'tis she who recovered the papers.” When he faced about the terrace was again deserted.

Nearly the whole of the Royal suite was in darkness. The corridor which shut off the library from communication with other rooms in that wing of the Palace, was but dimly lit, but the library itself was brilliantly illuminated. The room was nothing out of the ordinary, in fact had it been, simplicity was the only remarkable feature. The walls were lined with books; here and there where new cabinets were installed, a stag's head caught the light on crowning antlers. The window draperies were rich and dark; the floor was highly polished; the desk and chairs were of rustic woods; and, before the electric logs,

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in the great chimney, a tiger skin, markedly beautiful in colors, spread its silken warmth invitingly.

Books and papers were scattered upon the great claw-footed table; the chandelier above, with myriads of iridescent pendants, shed a white light over the apartment. In a huge chair beside the table, the Emperor sat, a news paper across his knees, his thoughts were absorbed perhaps with the news he had read. The light threw in sharp relief his strong features, and made a sort of silver radiance about him. So deep in thought was he, that the sliding of the panel did not disturb him, but a footfall upon the polished floor, made him start and raise his eyes. The picture encountered, brought him to his feet; the surprise upon his countenance gave way to gladness.

"I suppose I might have intrusted my mission to Lieutenant von Wieben," she began, taking the official papers from concealment beneath her cape. But, I felt that there were some things connected with these letters which must be explained to you. Some official papers fell into my hands in a rather extraordinary way—last evening."

The Emperor's face expressed immeasurable relief. "Official papers—connected with our government? What good fortune!" He took the thin package, glanced at it and, then, back to the girl. "I never discovered their loss until to-night. I tried to convince myself that they were only misplaced, but somehow I could not. Do you wish to tell me how they came into your possession?" He drew forward a chair, but the girl preferred to stand. His question made it easier for her begin. Marie plunged recklessly into the story. She gave a vivid account of the conversation she had over-heard, and, told how she had tricked the Secretary into revealing his iden-



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tity, and lastly she explained how, on account of the illness of an attaché's wife, she and Madame had been called back to the Embassy and thus all chance of giving him the papers was frustrated for that night.

The Emperor stood leaning against the table as the narrative progressed. One less innocent of intrigue than the girl, would have found his scrutiny hard to bear. He did not interrupt by remark or question, and if the Secretary's treachery moved him greatly, he did not betray it by word or look. At times his face was a mirror of his thoughts, at times it was impassive.

"Were you not rather reckless to come to me—like this?" he asked. "Even these papers hardly warranted such a risk."

Red flamed into the girl's cheek. "Perhaps I was a little impatient to be rid of my trust—but, from all I heard, I deemed them very important. You would not come to me—what else was I to do?"

"I thought best not to come to-night," and, after a moment's thought, "You might have sent for me."

"Sent for you!" her eyes widened a little. "Subjects do not usually summon Kings."

"You are not my subject."

Silence. "Am I so formidable?" he inquired almost playfully. "Cecil—if I could teach you to treat me as you do 'Hal' or my Lord—or, even Otto, but no, you must always consider my rank. When we are together—I want the foolish ceremonies and titles thrown down and trampled underfoot. It is Ferdinand, I want you to call me; Ferdinand I want you to love; Ferdinand who wants to serve you. Forget that I am an emperor; remember only that we love each other."

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"Sometimes—I forget," she said softly, "and sometimes, I can't. You are so accustomed to command—and dominate. If I were a subject, I fear I should prove a rebellious one."

For an instant Royal wonder made his eyes widen. "My commands are not always obeyed—sometimes even my entreaties are disregarded."

"Not by your subjects."

"No—not by my subjects," he answered.

"You are unreasonable—at times."

He did not like the word "unreasonable" and this allusion recalled vividly all that was said between them about Nacoli.

Marie had looked forward to this moment, for their parting had been stormy the night before. Now that the Russian had passed beyond "the bar," what had Ferdinand to fear—what cause for jealousy? (And, indeed, had there ever been a just cause?)

"The time is flying," she remarked, at last. "They will miss me at the Embassy."

The Emperor placed himself between her and the door. "No," he said, as she gathered the wrap about her slender figure. "It will be much safer when most of the guests are gone. Since you have risked so much in coming—you shall not go—yet. Besides, there are some things which must be explained before we part to-night."

She started a little—Nacoli!—and nervously fingered the folds of her cape.

"I have tried to forget last night; I have striven to blot out every disagreeable memory of the past thirty-six hours. But, Cecil, since Grand Duke Nacoli is gone, there can be no harm in telling me—why did you refuse to forbid him the Embassy?"

She stood silent, breathing hard.

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"If you loved him—this Russian Prince—why did you let me believe that your love was mine?"

"Your Majesty, I have not deceived you, in that. I have loved you, and you alone."

"Cecil——"

"Yes?"

"Why do you ignore my first question? Why do you not answer it?"

"Because"—she hesitated, staring at the flaming logs; she was determined to make him wait until the first of November, "because I do not wish to do so. Your trust in me is slight, indeed, if you can not wait a few days longer."

For a long moment the Emperor looked down into her eyes, "I deem you too sweet, too pure, too flawless to believe ill of you," he said slowly. "Perhaps I have been blind, but I have wanted to believe that it was the man for whom you care—not the Emperor. I believed that power and thrones mean little to you where your heart is not concerned.

"Then you should be willing to trust me."

He moved a little distance away but still kept between her and the door. "I do not wish to be hard, Cecil; I do not mean to be unjust; but I must have my way in this. If you love me, surely you can trust me whatever your secret. I may not be capable of judging right from wrong, but my sympathies are with you. You held my life in your hands, and saved it nobly. You held the very life of my country, and you bestowed it with the same nobleness. You love me, Cecil, or you could not have risked so much for me."

The girl was moved by his appeal, but still firm in her determination not to give in to him.

"I will answer anything—everything, on the first

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of November. My refusal to answer now, is not because I do not trust you, love you—but because, well, because I can not. The first day of November I will explain.”

The Emperor’s face darkened with momentary anger. The girl felt, rather than saw the change in him. The Slavic blood in him was capable of unutterable hardness.

In the ten years that he had ruled, he had ruled, in a sense, alone—fighting his own battles, meting out punishment and justice as he saw fit. He was used to dealing with men—men as stern of purpose as himself; they had found him a rather hard task-master in some respects, for his will was difficult to curb or change. It was not likely that, now, a girl could succeed in doing what crafty statesmen had failed to do. The Emperor loved her, but he saw no reason that she should deny his request.

The crackling of the incensed woods, was all the sound that broke the stillness. The Emperor turned from her to the window. Drawing aside the hanging, he gazed out at the far away twinkling lights—the lights of his city. The girl neither moved nor spoke to him. The great hands of the mantel-clock determinedly ticked away minute after minute past midnight. At last the Emperor turned.

Suddenly, in the mist of silvery light, the marks of care upon his face were painfully distinct. His whole expression was haggard and tired. The fever-brightness in his cheek, and the linen about his throat, sent a little remorseful thrill to Marie’s heart.

Hesitant and half-afraid of his masterfulness, of his calm coldness, she crossed the intervening space, in a little supplicating gesture. “Your Majesty—I am sorry. I can’t bear to make you angry to-night,

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with the thought of your absence for days, and of garrisons and, possibly—of war. Oh, don't go away like this." Discouraged by his unchanged expression, she bowed her head.

"Can't you—trust me till the first of November?"

"Until the first, and unto Eternity," he said. Unrelenting? Yes, they called him so, and yet he pressed her to him drawing her arms about his neck.

State cares; the Chancellor's illness; the Grand-Duke's death; the difference of the night before—all, slipped away. In their world, there was only a glowing room, an enveloping silver-radiance, and—love. The innumerable voices of the city were far away; both forgot that there were barriers between them; this was their hour together—the last perhaps for days.

But the golden, golden moments flitted away. There was so much to say and so few opportunities. They spoke of the past few days, of the events that had touched their lives in this short space; and, at last, of the official papers. The Emperor was anxious for the assurance that no one besides herself knew aught of them, at the British Embassy.

Marie confessed her childish fancy for him in years gone by; and the love that had grown with time. As he listened his glance grew very tender. He unfastened the cluster of orchids from her corsage and let them fall to the floor. Then selecting a great bouquet of crimson rose buds from the great bowl on the table, replaced the scattered flowers. The orchids found their way to the flaming logs. They had been the Russian's favorites. "The Rose of Auzenburg—the Rose of the Universe," he said, but the flowers were secondary in his thoughts.

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From somewhere in the outside world a clock chimed the hour after midnight.

"I must go," she reminded him. "Ah, now I hate to say, good bye."

"Good-bye until the first of November—then never good-bye again," he said. "I go to the garrisons tomorrow." For a moment he stood drinking in her beauty—the nearness was intoxicating, but Ferdinand was strong of will. "There is just one thing for which I would never forgive you—if you should cease to love me."

"Do not fear that." (Her words lingered in his memory in the trying days to come.) "What ever happens, I am yours alone. Always remember that I love you."

### **XIV.**

#### **THE TRAGEDY.**

Both Wimer and Baron Shüber had given all the evidence in their power to help unravel the dark mystery of the Inn at Wallburg, but there were linked with the tragedy two people of whom neither the Court Physician, nor the Emperor's gruff but well meaning cousin held any knowledge.

The scene reverts to the sick room at the Inn—Nacoli had fallen into a gentle sleep, and his two guardians were absent at luncheon. Foot steps, at last aroused the injured man and he opened his eyes to greet two visitors. The first man Nacoli did not recognize at once, the second was his valet. The first visitor strode to the far end of the room and stood trying to peer out of the vine covered window.

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His attitude and dress were strangely familiar, and when he turned, Nacoli gave an exclamation—half disgust.

The valet began to bemoan his master's plight, but Nacoli cut him short. "Come—come, this is no time for lamentations. The only difference is, you must depend more upon yourself—I must depend more upon you. Remember I do depend upon you. This wound is but a temporary inconvenience. In a day or so, I shall be abroad again. The papers, of which I spoke, are in my coat. Take them and go. Wait! you must not swerve one iota from my instructions. Remember the reward. Now go!"

The valet deftly extracted the papers from their place of concealment, gave Nacoli one parting look which seemed a promise of something, and silent, soft-footed, departed as he had come.

"Thank God," the Grand Duke muttered, "it is over! I thought, at the last moment, he would fail me—the chicken-hearted—. Why did you come here?" suddenly turning his attention to the visitor.

"Ma foi! I do not know," smiling suavely, "I heard that his Highness, the Grand Duke was wounded, accidentally, while hunting."

The Grand Duke scowled moodily. "I know why you came," he looked the visitor up and down from soft green hat to foppish cane and shoes. It was a diabolical face that smiled down at him, and, in that moment, the wounded man likened it to Satan's own. "'Oso, you are too fine-looking a chap to turn your talents to such dishonorable ends. You had wealth, and position, and a beautiful wife, in your own land—why could you not be content?"

The other shrugged. "The tale is too oft' told to be repeated here. I was not to blame. If I ruined

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my career there, I have sought to retrieve my fortunes since I came away—I am on a fair road to success.”

“What have you done with the intervening years?”

The visitor made a grimace, the thought was evidently distasteful to him. “As you know, I had to leave—where I went I did not care. Money and friends were gone, and my future a blank—well I decided to carve out Destiny for myself. I wandered to South America, and fell in with a venerable physician, who took a great fancy to me. He was deeply interested in herbs and chemicals and taught me many things about them. We traveled across the continent together; the natives knew and respected the physician and were extraordinarily kind to us. We trudged over mountains and through jungles by day, and slept with the sickly tropical stars for a canopy by night—living on wild meats and herbs and berries. Then the physician met his death on the Amazon, and left me his worldly possessions—he had no near relatives.

“I crossed the sea again—came to Switzerland. I was remarkably changed by the Southern sun, I renewed my College studies, and compiled a book telling my experiences along the Amazon—the rest you have already heard.”

“You spoke of medicines and herbs—it is said the natives of South America are adepts at healing.”

“They are. I learned of one remedy which I carry with me always. But this is not what I wish to discuss. Are you going away from Auzenburg?”

“Not any time soon. But you may rest easily as long as you are accommodating.”

“I fear I can not be that—for personal reasons.”

The Grand Duke yawned. “You know the price—



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take your choice. Either do as I wish, and live in security, or——”

“You will not betray me!”

“Now see here, Arioso, for the sake of old College days, I prefer to leave you as I found you, but you will have to pay for that consideration. The price is very insignificant—not gold, but influence—you are in a position to be of great service to me, and I intend that you shall be.”

“But if I can not be?”

“Then you must take the consequences.”

The other strode the length of the apartment, then paused beside the bed. “For the sake of those old college days you mentioned, do me the great kindness to depart.” Suddenly he clinched his hands. “What right have you, who have all that makes life worth living, to come here and to snatch away my hopes of the future? This time downfall would not mean mere banishment; my very life itself hangs upon a thread. I am playing a desperate game, and I mean to win. You have the freedom of the world. Go, and leave me and my life alone.”

“I did not know that I should disturb your precious life when I came here,” said Nacoli with his first show of ill temper.

“Then depart—I implore!”

“I have matters here that require my presence.”

“For how long a time?”

“Until I see fit to depart.”

“You will not understand that your very presence, here, is a menace to me—it means almost certain detection.”

“Your presence here is most convenient for me, I assure you.”

“You persist in remaining?”

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"Absolutely."

Again the visitor paced the room in agitation.

"Come," Nacoli capitulated, "you have only to help me, and you are safe, so far as I am concerned. Let us talk over the affair calmly." His eye fell upon his medicines and a decanter of wine upon the table, "I am thirsty—let us drink to our mutual advantage."

The visitor stopped in his walk, and suddenly grew so pale that Nacoli was alarmed and exclaimed.

"It is nothing," the other hastened to say. "My head aches, but wine with a drop of this in it will revive me." He drew from his pocket, a tiny vial, that caught the light in an opalescent gleam of hues, as he held it aloft.

"Some of your herb-healing potions?" Nacoli inquired contemptuously.

Arioso selected from the table two glasses of like size and shape, and poured out the wine and then held the vial above the glass nearest him and let an infinitesimal drop of the liquid slip into the glass. In the instant that his body was between Nacoli and the table, he changed the glasses, and gave to Nacoli's waiting hand the goblet poured for himself.

"To our 'mutual advantage,'" he repeated and both drank the wine.

The Grand Duke settled back in his pillows and Arioso strode to the window, and tried again to pierce the lattice net-work of vines. The latter's face was remarkably contorted, white and terrified, and the hand which he placed upon the window shook as with an ague.

The vial, replaced in his vest, was burning through him; he could not look at the Duke again; he could not turn. He shuddered inwardly. "Coward! Fool!" he said to himself. "Who will suspect—'tis a good

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riddance to you, and the world. Would you have let slip the opportunity and be hounded day and night by the fear of betrayal? You, who have ruined so many, would you have stopped at that—let one life stand between you and a throne. Are you a woman that you are unnerved by this. You who have done so much—risked so much—do you waver now?”

He turned about boldly, and walked to the middle of the room—Nacoli had fallen into a doze, his sonorous breathing was good evidence. Perhaps, after all, the drug would not do its work. Perhaps—

His next thought was of his own safety. He did not fear detection, even if he remained there, because the action of the drug administered was undiscernible to the most experienced physician—it left no after-effect upon the victim to proclaim its presence. But, now, he had other fish to fry and he must be gone.

A silent witness to the scene, shrank into the shadowy curtains of the little hallway, as the man hastened out—watched him the length of the narrow main-hall, until he was lost to view, and then stood forth from the shadows.

The witness was a young woman, tall, dark and exceptionally attractive. She wore a riding costume of garnet colored cloth, and a diminutive silver-garnished cap, set upon hair as black as her flashing eyes. She raised her clasped hands above her head and then let them fall helplessly to her sides; her face was expressive of extreme anguish. For a long moment she stared into the room, and in her mind's eye saw again the little scene enacted at the table; then turned and went out by a side door opening upon the porch. She was fully self possessed when she came upon a peasant girl peeling apples.

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"No, do not get up, Emma," she said, as the rosy-cheeked maid quickly gathered up her work. "It has been so long since I visited 'Göttmutter, that I have nearly forgotten the old place. I never saw such masses of bloom for this season of the year;" as she paused to gaze at the many-colored flowers in the yard.

Emma, sitting with her beaded-plaits of glossy tresses toward the house, and facing the garden, had not seen from which of the three doors the lady stepped. "It is good to see you once in a while, Countess. Many a great lady would have forgotten us poor-folk long ago. I have some nice fresh cheese, and bread not long from the oven, if you will lift the cover from that dish. You are going to remain this evening.

"I wish I could, Emma," the young woman availed herself of the proffered delicacies and sat down upon the step. "Sometimes I wish I were back again in this quaint old village. Do you have many visitors?"

"A few," smiled Emma, "Only this morning a fine nobleman was brought here. They say he was injured while hunting. A ferocious-looking, middle-aged man, with tiny, blue eyes and stiff side-whiskers came with him and also a physician."

"Do you know their names?"

The girl shook her head. "Herr Kaff, Herr Bemming, and Herr Bretter—but I dare say they are not their real ones."

"What do the others look like?" the 'Countess' was interested now, and leaned forward with her hands clasped about her knee.

Emma tilted her head, smiling saucily, "the wounded gentleman is tall—you would have to look up at him like this, if he were standing. Brown-

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riding suit, boots, black beard—may be the Countess would call him handsome.”

“And the physician?” there was more than passing interest in the question so calmly asked.

“Very tiny—insignificant, wears grey and has a habit of squinting his eyes.”

The Countess arose. “The cheese and bread are delicious Emma. No I will not rob you of another slice. Tell Göttmutter I shall come out again in a day or two, and, Emma, please do not mention my little visit, as I ran away.”

“No, Countess,” and, used to such warnings from the young woman, Emma resumed her work, as the Countess ran lightly down the steps, found her horse, mounted and rode away.

Even the memory of this conversation was driven from the mind of the innocent peasant girl, by the tragedy which electrified the peaceful Inn a few moments later.

### **XV.**

#### **A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE.**

There is nearly always a lull before a storm. At times, we are hardly conscious of it, but afterward we look back on the moments or days, as the case may be, which were charged with an almost foreboding calm—we recall them with peculiar dread.

In the Auzen capital, the evening of a new day had come; in diplomatic circles, a few incidents seem worthy of note. Von Berewin, the military attaché of the Austrian Embassy precipitately abandoned his post, and departed for a destination unknown; the

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Turkish minister was recalled to Constantinople; and Lord Ravenswood was summoned to an important conference in Vienna, otherwise politics was quiet almost to stagnation. The Emperor's temporary absence was a state secret for the day. Save the American girl, probably no one in the whole city knew of it.

At the British Embassy, Marie, Madame and Miss Dorothy were gathered in Madame's boudoir. Countess Alis had telephoned for the young Englishwoman to act as "substitute at bridge" and Madame was busily re-arranging an already perfect coiffeur. Miss Dorothy's novel was uninterrupted by the ceaseless chatter of the young woman.

"The Countess is a dear," said Marie. "She never includes the Secretary in her informals;" the words were spoken as an after-thought.

"The Emperor's secretary? She abhors the man." Madame was silent for a few minutes and then: "Mon dieu! when I think of the Grand Duke, my very blood runs cold! Who could have murdered him?" Her voice sank to a whisper at the last words. "So dashing, so good to look at! It has been bad for the Emperor—and Otto von Wieben."

Marie moved to the dressing-table and fumbled the trinkets. "No one believes, Otto fought the Grand Duke. The whole thing is a dark mystery. When one thinks of the history of thrones—it is not unprecedented. Perhaps, some one thought to do the Emperor a service——"

"But you know there are numberless secret agents connected with the court. I have heard that Nacoli made threats concerning the Emperor."

"One thing is certain," said Madame with conviction, "whoever perpetrated the deed thought the blame would fall on the Emperor."

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Marie started. "How could it?"

"Easily enough. They say, unless poison had been found in the wine, no suspicion would have been aroused. He would have died from his wound—and the Emperor would have been culpable."

Marie shuddered. This was all too true. "How long will you be away?"

"Till twelve, perhaps."

"I shall wait up for you."

"If you will—but I may be later."

When the room was bereft of Madame's vivacious presence, Marie seated herself at the writing-table and commenced a letter to Harold, which she soon tore in fragments and wrote a telegram instead. In the light of their grave conference, the night of his departure, it was a rather interesting message,

Harold Savan Huntington, Esq.:

c/o Covell & Huntington, London, England.

If possible, return by first of November. Have not changed plans, but your presence necessary.

M. C. d'A.

Suddenly, Miss Dorothy sat erect, letting the novel slip to the cushions at her feet.

"Oh! I had forgotten that Falesse was out," Marie exclaimed as Matilde entered with a message. It was from Harold:

"Will carry out your instructions. Expect me by first of November.

Hal."

Marie destroyed the message, she had so lately penned. "The instant Falesse returns send her to me," she said quietly.

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"Yes, Mademoiselle."

Falesse seldom took advantage of her "free evenings," especially in Auzenburg. But this time a young sergeant had invited her to a play, and Falesse had consented. Matilde soon returned in a frenzy of excitement. "Oh, Mam'selle," she gasped, "a messenger has come to tell that Falesse has fallen and broken her ankle."

"He says she is at St. Josef's hospital, and begs you to come to her."

"You will send some one, Dear," urged Miss Dorothy. "See how late it is!"

"But the girl may be suffering dreadfully, Auntie. Get on your wraps and come with me."

"My Darling, I couldn't think of going out, such a night, subject as I am to neuralgia, and at my age——"

"Matilde, bring my wraps and rouse the coachman. I suppose, you'll have to go with me. Falesse shall be brought here at once. The very idea of her permitting any body to take her to a hospital!"

"Then, get my things, too, Matilda," groaned Miss Dorothy. "Since you insist on going, Marie, I can not let you go alone. I hope it isn't far; I know this will be the death of me."

Matilde hastened on her several errands, and in a short time, returned with wraps for the two ladies. She was more agitated than before.

"Mam'selle, Henri is beastly intoxicated and I can not find ze footman. He is away for ze evening. I ran to ze door of Henri's room and knock and knock, but he not answer, I open ze door; he asleep with his head on ze table." She accompanied her words with dramatic gestures.

The three women descended the stairs. The mes-



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senger waited, cap in hand, near the door. To Marie's anxious questions he replied that the girl had fallen and broken her ankle; more than that, he did not know. "Telephone for a cab, instantly," ordered Marie. The messenger interposed deferentially. "I am a driver for Zeugauhunten, if my Lady will permit me to drive her to the hospital——"

"You have a cab?"

"Yes, my Lady, at the entrance."

Matilde was sorely distressed, and not at all satisfied with the turn affairs had taken. She went to the kitchens and thence to the servants' quarters; the coachman was just as she had left him—dead to the world for that evening—and he had been recommended by an Auzen Count! Matilde shrugged expressively, and returned to her realm of duty. As she re-entered Madame's boudoir, she noticed the time—half-past eight o'clock. The Mam'selles would hardly be away more than an hour. Taking the novel, Miss Dorothy had thrown aside, she settled herself to pass the time in reading and, as she had rested little the previous night, soon fell asleep. It was twelve o'clock when she awoke with a start—a door had slammed somewhere in the house. The wind had risen, and a thin rain was falling. She went to Marie's boudoir—everything was in perfect order; the bed-room door was ajar; the room was vacant. Miss Dorothy's room, too, was unoccupied. Matilde, now thoroughly frightened rushed into the hall-way, and almost collided with Lady Ravenswood, whose dark hair and cloak were bejeweled with rain drops.

"What is the matter?" she demanded.

The French woman wrung her hands as she excitedly tried to explain. While Madame stood bewildered, the first Secretary and his wife entered,

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and Madame hastily descended to hold consultation with them, the while Matilde, oppressed by her own seeming carelessness, wailed "Bon—le bon Dieu!"

Lady Ravenswood hurried to the telephone and called up the hospital, while Matilde ceased wailing a few moments to listen.

"Not there!" she heard Madame cry excitedly. "Indeed, you must be mistaken—they left here at half-past eight. What? The girl was not injured! I am mad with anxiety! Do hurry!"

While Lady Ravenswood waited and Matilde stood bereft of speech or movement, and the agitated Englishman fumbled his monacle ribbon and gazed appealingly from Madame to his wife—a new sensation occurred. The doors at the end of the corridor swung inward, and there, before their eyes, erect, smiling, and uninjured stood Falesse.

Matilde shrieked, and Madame dropped the receiver. Bewildered at the scene, Falesse glanced inquiringly from one to the other, and was, in turn, greeted by a veritable storm of questions, the sum and substance of which was "Where were Marie and Miss Dorothy?"

The girl was no less agitated. "Indeed, I do not know," she stoutly asserted. "You know, Madame, that Mam'selle Cecil," (even in this trying moment Falesse was careful of the name. The incognito had cost every member of the household some uneasy moments when some unlooked for incident or pleasant memory of Londontown had brought the girl's real name to diplomatic lips, and only magnificent maneuvers and suave speeches have smoothed over the almost fatal allusion), gave me permission to attend the theater. Broken my ankle!" she cried indignantly on learning of the messenger; "Why, I am

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as sound as when I left. Oh, Madame—Madame, what is it? What has happened to Mam'selle?" The girl loved her young mistress and her emotion was pitiful.

The little group looked at one another, and were dumb. Madame was the first to speak. Surely something terrible had happened—just what, no one knew, but something must be done, and at once. The Secretary decided to go to the hospital, and the four women were left alone, shuddering, helpless, like frightened deer. In an incredibly short time, the Secretary returned, knowing no more than when he left the Embassy, except that neither had been at St. Josef's hospital that evening. The tension of the moment was terrible. Matilde, naturally emotional, began to sob, hysterically. Falesse, habitually calm, clung to Madame's gown.

"Madame," she cried.

"What is it? Don't you see that I am powerless? Oh, Hal—Hal, if he were only here! What can I do—what can I do? Oh, for some one who can act—who would know what to do!"

"There is some one, Madame—if you will call on him," ventured Falesse.

"Who, child?—whom do you mean?"

"I know, he loves her, Madame—we all know it, and he is so powerful——"

"Whom do you mean?"

"The Emperor, Madame."

Lady Ravenswood gasped, "Why did I not think of him before. I will call up Count Bracken at once."

That such proceedings might be ultra non-conventional, did not occur to any one of the bewildered company, on the contrary that seemed the natural thing to do, in the circumstances.

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To Madame, an age passed before Count Bracken answered at the other end of the line. His voice instantly lost its irritated tone on ascertaining whom he was addressing. Regardless of every thing Lady Ravenswood poured forth her trouble. Between her hysterical exclamations and dismal lamentations, the statesman did not understand half the story, but he did understand that something most distressing had happened. He was compelled to inform Madame of the Emperor's absence (the first official to let out the secret, which he did not relish) as she insisted on speaking to his Majesty. Count Bracken was most sympathetic.

"I sincerely regret it is impossible for you to talk with his Majesty, as he is not in the Palace. He has left for the Austrian frontier."

Madame was too much engrossed with her own troubles to note the significance of this news. "He will not return before the first of November."

"Is it possible to speak with the Chancellor?"

I fear not, your Ladyship. You wish me to go to the Embassy? . . . Certainly, I shall do so with pleasure. . . . You may expect me at six."

Madame knew that between now and six o'clock, Count Bracken would not be idle, and she felt that here was one on whose help she could rely. She telegraphed Harold to return without delay. Her husband would return that morning, so there was no need to wire him. She was strangely awed, and mystified. She had never paid any attention to newspaper accounts of disappearances, and tried to persuade herself that this incident had caused undue excitement. However that seventh sense—intuition—which is peculiar to her sex—told her plainly that the matter was very grave.

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Precisely at six o'clock, Count Bracken, muffled in water-proofs, sprang from his conveyance, and dashed up the Embassy steps.

Madame repeated her story of the strange happenings of the night, and the visitor listened with attention and with constantly increasing bewilderment.

"I have already informed the Minister of Police, Madame, and he will set all forces to work on the affair. And I promise you that I will see the Auzen Chancellor as soon as possible. We shall find your cousins; never fear."

But, though Count Bracken was conscientious in his undertaking, and was the first official to interview Count Van Hellick that morning, no news came of the missing women. From the instant they had left the British Embassy, in company with the messenger, all trace of them was lost. It seemed as if the earth had swallowed them. The gendarmes were either stupid or neglectful, and obtained no clue. Count Bracken noticed the peculiarly grim smile that gleamed for an instant on the Auzen Chancellor's face on hearing the news—and Count Bracken, being an astute man, thought he understood. Van Hellick hated the girl who had saved the Emperor's life, and was determined to shatter the Emperor's infatuation for her. In Count Bracken's heart, he did not accuse the elder man of knowing any thing of the disappearance, though the Auzen Chancellor stopped at nothing where the state was concerned. Count Bracken knew that his political adversary was glad, and that no help could be expected from that quarter. In that moment, both Marie and Ferdinand won a friend and ally, who was a power in the country. Count Bracken resolved that the Emperor should know at once, and resolved furthermore

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to pit his own shrewdness against Van Hellick's in the endeavor to aid the Emperor. Before this, Count Bracken had studiously ignored all attacks made upon him by Van Hellick, but now he took up the gauntlet of open warfare.

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In Annaistane, the Emperor stumbled upon a state of affairs entirely different from that on the northern border. Garrisons and towns along the route, he had found in peaceful but alert condition. Rumors had flocked to the capital of the unrest in the Duchy, but no one save Von Bertrom had given the situation much thought. The people, most nearly concerned in the loan, were in no wise anxious for the dual-monarchy to liquidate the debt; they were more Teutonic than Slav and much preferred the dominion of Cozhurst. Insurrection had flamed out; the sole garrison in Wassing, the capital was sparsely fortified and manned; guns and ammunition were appearing like magic in every quarter of the city. The Colonel of the little detachment lost no time in appealing to the Auzen capital for re-enforcements, but until that morning, none had come. Ten miles from Wassing, the Emperor and his staff joined the five hundred hussars en route to the belabored city. The little company presented a gallant appearance with their military insignia, and their ardor undampened by the unpropitious morning. Startling bits of news, concerning the disorder they were approaching, met them on the way, and shortly before reaching the city gates, the muffled sound of firing smote the air. The gates were barred, the warden was slow to appear—the first man perhaps to note the approach of troops. He was greeted with:

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"Open—in the Emperor's name!" With frantic haste, he hurled the heavy irons back, and watched tremblingly, the ranks of seasoned veterans ride into the town. No words were needed to give every soldier a clear idea of the state of affairs. As they boldly rode down the street, red banners flaunted the story of the insurgents before them, and in the vicinity of the fort, ranks of armed men were hurling missiles and returning at intervals the weak fire from beyond the walls.

"Do not fire!" The Emperor's voice rang out sharply, as the soldiers prepared to charge. "Use the flat of your sabers!"

The conflict raged, thick and furious. The soldiers within the fort were convinced that the insurgents had been re-enforced, and were prepared to make a sally outside the gates. Men fell right and left; many of the Auzen soldiers were grappled from their horses; the Auzen flag was torn from its parapet; bullets hissed; the mob howled. In the dire extremity, the one word of command "Fire!" rang out above the din. The soldiers and insurgents, struggling for possession of the gates, were drowned in the smoke. "Fire!" Knowledge that the flag and staff had been swept down in the turmoil, infused new energy into the Auzen ranks. "Down with the Dragon!" some one yelled; "May it remain down!"

Through the surging mass about the main gate, a man struggled, and gained the parapet, dragging with might and main something after him. The parapet was gained, and the staff re-appeared—the blazing golden dragon on its olive ground was soiled and torn, but it was there, triumphant, lordly, and, beside it, stood—the Emperor.

The soldiers saw, and sent up cheer after cheer; a

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number of the older men rallied around their leader, thrusting themselves between him and danger. Try as they would, they had not been able to keep him from the thickest of the fight—with a leader, such as he, they felt, they could fearlessly storm the gates of the Nether World if need be.

The tide of the conflict turned with the re-appearance of the flag; the rebels dispersed like chaff before the wind. The news of the Emperor's arrival sent a thrill off through the city. To Annaistane, he stood for all that the golden dragon represented—indomitable courage and relentless endurance. The fresh troops had appeared when least expected, and therefore had intensified the already tumultuous terror. The city and the garrison were saved to Auzen arms. The Emperor found every thing in as good shape as could be expected, and saw the new men installed with a feeling of satisfaction. He could leave the fort to them with implicit confidence.

While conversing with the commanding officer, an orderly approached with a message for the Emperor. It was from the Auzen capital. "Lieber Gott!" he said when he had read it the second time, "Colonel, when does the next train leave for Auzenburg?"

"In exactly five minutes, your Majesty."

"Then, I must bid you adieu. My presence at home is imperative."

Otto, who had stood nearby during this queer little scene, was handed the message, when the Emperor and his staff were ensconced on the Auzen-bound Express, and was no less astonished than the Emperor had been.

"That is difficult to credit, your Majesty," he observed. "I do not recognize the signature."

"It is from Count Bracken," was the reply, "the



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matter is evidently serious or he would not think proper to send such a message. And I have not been away from the capital thirty-six hours."

With the Emperor, to think had always been to act, and when realization of Cecil Huntington's disappearance fully possessed him, he lost no time in deciding upon his course of action: he was needed—that he knew from the tone of Count Bracken's message.

The party reached the capital about noon. The streets were thronged, despite the rain of the morning; every one knew the story of the disappearance, and every one was profoundly interested. Here, indeed was something not reckoned upon! Russian, and Duchy, and foreign troubles, were forgotten for the time being, and the Emperor's unexpected return was hailed with delight. Perhaps, all the world did not sympathize with this lover, but very few of the world sympathized with the Auzen Chancellor, so the lover had the preponderance of favor. Here, indeed was a mystery, well worth unravelling: the man, whom Otto von Wieben or was it the Emperor?—had fought was murdered, and the girl who was the indirect cause of the affair had disappeared. And another mystery, equally insoluble—what had become of the Aunt? Many a worthy Auzen puzzled himself into indigestion and insomnia over the mystery. What was to happen next?

The Emperor, went immediately to the British Embassy, saw Madame and heard from her the full account of all that had occurred. Several times she was on the point of confessing the girl's masquerade, but fear of him, held her silent. "Oh Heaven! your Majesty, what shall I do?" she cried. "Now I have told you all! What shall I do?"

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"You have done all in your power, he answered kindly. "You say her aunt has disappeared also?"

"Both together. Ah, I am desolate! I shall never forgive myself if any thing has happened to them, never! never!"

The Emperor, bad as the situation undoubtedly was, felt relieved. All manner of wild explanations presented themselves, but he thrust them aside impatiently. He felt guilty of disloyalty at one thought which recurred persistently—had Nacoli been living—but he would not think that of her. At last he revealed his thoughts to Madame. He forgot that, perhaps, she did not know of his affection for her cousin, but what mattered? She would know sooner or later.

"Either Miss Huntington has been kidnapped or—she has run away from me," he said. These were the alternatives.

Madame dried her tears to stare at him in unconcealed amazement, "Cecil run away, and from you—why?"

A red glow colored his dark skin, "Madame—you are aware that I care for her, deeply, tenderly. Several times she has spoken of running away from me. She has considered it her duty."

Madame shook her head. "She has not run away from you—I know it."

"Then she has been kidnapped," said the Emperor. He was glad to hear Madame express that opinion, but he was not at all sure that he agreed. For the girl and her aunt to slip quietly away would have been an easy matter, thinking that all investigation would be baffled. Even Lady Ravenswood might be deceived. However, he did not want to believe this. The girl had seemed fearful of something the night

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before last—her parting words proved that. She had clung to him, and why those words?—"should anything come between us always remember that I love you." In spite of himself, the Emperor was shaken. She had decided to give him up—to go away, when he would have braved the world to make her his own. He would not let her go; he would find her, and compel her to listen to him in spite of all.

The Emperor did not rest content with what Count Bracken had done. On leaving Madame, he went to the Minister of Police, ordered several detectives put to work on the case at once, and demanded that the press be bridled. The newspapers needed no warning from him as the Auzen Chancellor had already issued a prohibitory mandate. Van Hellick had no intention that the Emperor's madness (as he chose to term it) should be flaunted before the world—so the press was silent. Then, the Emperor went to Van Hellick's residence.

The old statesman showed no sign of illness save by the palor of his skin. He was surprised to see the Emperor, who he thought, still in the Duchy.

The Emperor, after greetings and cordial inquiry, was not long in coming to the point:

"May I ask why you instructed the gendarmerie to let the matter of Miss Huntington's disappearance drop?"

The Chancellor answered readily: "Certainly, your Majesty. I thought that the best thing to do after the information, gathered."

"Why?"

"For the reputation of the lady in question," the old man answered calmly.

"Look here, Chancellor," the Emperor said in unruffled voice. "The Minister of Police laid that 'in-

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formation' before me, and, frankly, I would not give a snap of my fingers for the whole of it. If you credit such a story, you are not so astute as I thought you."

The Chancellor's eyes lowered under the anger in the young face, but he was pitilessly determined. "If your Majesty will listen, you, too, will be convinced. I do not credit every thing I hear—I do not credit any thing until I have investigated to the bottom——"

Then you can not believe this."

"I do believe it, absolutely."

For several moments neither spoke; the Chancellor said: "I have a message which she sent to Von Berewin; as you know, he left his post here yesterday. Where he went no one knows, but a lady, answering to Miss Huntington's description accompanied him. His friends here say that he was married, two years ago in Vienna, to a lady of the nobility."

"Whoever told you that Cecil Huntington left this city with Von Berewin, lied. How do you account for the simultaneous disappearance of the Aunt?"

"I have not interested myself in that. Do you wish to read her letter?"

"I do not," emphatically. "Have you forgotten, Chancellor, that she is the British Ambassador's cousin?"

"It was in consideration of that fact that I adopted this course."

"You need not have carried your consideration to such extent. I have instructed the gendarmerie to search for the ladies until they are found."

The Chancellor cast him a sharp glance, "I was unaware that your Majesty takes so much interest in such affairs."

"I take great interest in this affair, Count. I in-

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tend to leave no stone unturned until they are located."

"And then——?"

"Then, Miss Huntington shall be my wife."

The statesman was not prepared for this avowal. He knew that the Emperor was enamoured of the girl, but little dreamed that he would so far forget his rank and birth as to wish to marry her; it was preposterous.

"Mein Gott, your Majesty! No, no! I can not hear aright. Why, such an alliance would ruin the country. Do you not remember that, if you leave no heir, the crown will fall to Prince Ludwig—and that means absorption by Austria?"

The Emperor raised level brows, "You need not excite yourself on that score, Chancellor; if I said my wife, I also meant my Queen."

"But this can not be—your Majesty must realize that this is impossible."

"I do not think it impossible," was the reply, given with an assurance, the speaker was far from feeling. "I love my people, and I know, they love me. There have been some few cases, Chancellor, where royal marriages were not governed by politics. I know Miss Huntington is not within the pale, from which I am expected to choose a wife, but that could be remedied."

The Chancellor's eyes glittered ominously. "With all deference, your Majesty, I am positive it can not be remedied."

"Why?"

"The people will not consent."

"That remains to be seen."

"You are determined to ask them?"

"I am." The Emperor arose.

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Van Hellick started up. "Sire, perhaps, you do not realize all that has been said concerning the events of the past few days. Your name and hers are linked from one end of the country to the other. Count Bracken is blind; the light-headed Countess has helped you—I pray your pardon—to make a fool of yourself. Do you suppose the gossips are done with the altercation at the hotel—the duel? And night before last—Mein Gott, if the world knew——"

The Emperor started, "What of night before last?"

"Some one stumbled upon an officer of your guard and a lady—coming from your apartment."

"Who was that some one?"

"I can not answer."

The Emperor's eyes were blazing. "Count Van Hellick, you have many privileges, but spying upon my personal affairs, is not one of them. You do not have to tell me the name of your informant, I already know. Take care lest this tool of yours make for your own undoing. You expected me to deny what you have just said—I do not deny it. Out of respect for you, I forewent the pleasure of having a few hours in Miss Huntington's company. The lost official papers over which you were so distressed, fell into her hands, the night of the masque ball, and with them some very important knowledge about your informant. She returned the papers to me night before last. I need give no explanation to you concerning my actions, but since you are determined to believe everything detrimental to her——"

"I thought only what the world would have thought," put in the Chancellor. "Your Majesty will pardon my presumption—I am working for your welfare, and that of the country. If I have spoken harshly of the lady, I said what I believed to be the truth."

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"She knew that I was going away from the city, and she risked everything to get the papers to me before my departure. We, two, owe her a great deal—I owe her my life, and you—since you care so much for the State—you owe her a vast debt of gratitude for keeping us out of a dreadful official scrape——"

"That is just the point," replied the Chancellor, a little encouraged; "everything must be subservient to the State, if we are to keep up our prestige."

"The toil of a life-time, and life itself belongs to the State, as far as I am concerned," said the Emperor. "Almost every hour of the day, I spend in planning and doing for the country's welfare."

"I know that, Sire, and, therefore, I beg you to weigh carefully every movement in the days to come. We have a hard battle ahead of us, and the outcome depends on you. We look to you for our salvation. I have been kept busy since the moment I was able to leave my bed in straightening tangled stories, and scoffing at outrageous rumors. One thing has annoyed me greatly, if I may speak of it. The trouble at the Hohenstauffenn has gotten out, and many versions are current—every story centers about the lady, we have been discussing. I would greatly appreciate your Majesty's permission to deny emphatically that the altercation had any thing to do with—Miss Huntington."

The emphasis put upon the girl's name was more insulting than any word the old man had uttered—for what was said of her visit to the palace, had been the truth. Angry red sprang to the Emperor's cheek, "You need neither affirm nor deny any thing you hear on the subject. Either is entirely unnecessary. And, before bidding you adieu, Count, let me suggest that you keep an eye on your accomplished protégé."

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I expect Monsieur Huntington, Saturday—perhaps, after his arrival, we may be able to throw some light on this mysterious disappearance.”

### **XVI.**

#### **THE COUP DE MAIN OF THE CHANCELLOR.**

The Chancellor beat a tattoo to the accompaniment of the rain, that splashed against the window, as he scowled out on the white roofs and tangle of wires beyond the glass. The thirtieth of October had dawned with leaden skies—a day destined to be the most eventful, the city had ever known.

In the Chancellor's hand was a letter; in his face, determination. Many things had been revealed to him since the day of the Emperor's unexpected return from the garrisons—among them, the name of the man who had informed the Emperor of Miss Huntington's disappearance. He had Antonio Wiebenovitch to thank for the letter. The insignificant looking envelope contained something far dearer to him than a million ducats. He knew what was in the missive; oh, yes, he knew well. He felt no scruples for what he meant to do—it was for the good of the nation. He had not even asked the Secretary how he had come by the letter—what mattered? The Chancellor had laughed to scorn the idea of being outwitted by his protégé. Would the poor instructor, whom he had recommended for such a trusty post, betray the man who had placed him there? Antonio had crept into the Chancellor's inmost life; Van Hellick admired Antonio because of his learning, and



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suaveness of tongue. In all the Empire, no better companion or emissary was available. And as for taking the word of Cecil Huntington with regard to Antonio's treachery—the Chancellor said "Faugh!"

"All men are fools at some period in their existence," thought he, "but of all the blind ones I ever saw, Ferdinand is the worst. "Ach! It is too much!"

The girl had not come to Auzenburg with any designs upon the throne, perhaps, but the Emperor's continued acknowledgment of her heroism had awakened her aspirations to the crown, and the English Ambassador's wife and Countess Alis were heartily in sympathy with such aspirations. Van Hellick knew that no amount of coaxing could convert the Countess into an ally, and he began to regret the firm stand he had maintained against this Austrian woman. He squared his shoulders; he would fight the battle if need be alone.

The entrance of the chamberlain reminded him that one person on whom he could depend had arrived at last—his colleague who had been called to Athol and detained until the previous night.

"Himmel! such weather," exclaimed Von Bertrom, taking the proffered seat.

"It reflects the face of affairs here. Have you been to the Palace?"

"No." Von Bertrom thrust his feet toward the fire. "I tell you, Max, the Emperor's visit has wonderfully quieted the Duchy, but unrest is showing itself in Athol. I wish the first of November were tidied over."

"And I. You missed a great deal by leaving. The Emperor is bent on his own destruction. That little English hussy has completely bewitched him."

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"—has developed into something serious?" inquired Von Bertrom.

"Serious," cried the Count, beating the table with his glass. "If you call blind infatuation serious——"

"The lady has disappeared." Von Bertrom uttered the words in such a manner as to provoke a sharp glance from Van Hellick. Of late, the Auzen Chancellor had lost much of his composure.

"The best thing that could happen! You have heard surmises of her whereabouts and different versions of the kidnapping, possibly. The stories are enough to disenchant a man less strict than the Emperor. Two days remain to us; perhaps, we may be able to disillusionize him before the first of November."

"We still have the offer from Bohemia?"

"Yes, but his Highness grows tired of suspense, and insists on either coming to an agreement or terminating negotiations at once. He offers the entire loan with the hand of his sister."

"And Ferdinand?"

The Count brought his brows together, "He persists in refusing the offer, when it means the Duchy, the loan, our prestige. Of all the rash, inconsiderate, obdurate——"

Their eyes met and something in Von Bertrom's caused the sentence to remain unfinished. "He is inexorably determined."

"On what?"

"On making a spectacle of himself and us before the world. Think of the Hohenstauffenns since Emperor Hadred's time—strong-minded, temperate, immovable, holding their honor and the honor of the state above all."

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"I think," broke in Von Bertrom, "that you are a trifle inconsistent; the very quality, you commend in his ancestors, you condemn in him. One can hardly call him weak-minded."

The Count did not reply.

"And temperate—why that epithet? Is it applicable here?"

"A person can be temperate or intemperate in all things," rejoined Van Hellick sullenly. "You see only perfections in him."

"Perhaps, Max, but I have not gone through life, trying to pick flaws. It is like digging away the moss to leave a stone. There is beauty—and goodness in all things if one will but see it, but he, who seeks a stone, will surely find it."

"You should have succeeded Kant."

"And you, Zeno."

"Tut!"

"Bah!"

Both arose, and Von Bertrom paced the floor his hands clasped behind him.

"What is your opinion of this strange disappearance?"

Van Hellick almost smiled. "That of every one else."

"You have given orders to search for the ladies."

"I have not."

Von Bertrom stopped abruptly.

"I thought out of consideration for my Lord, the British Minister, the less hub-bub and publicity, the better. But Ferdinand, on his arrival must revoke my orders, call on Madame and throw the Gendarmerie, the ministry, and the whole capital into a fever by his demands. Count Bracken—Count Bracken, mind you, wired him—recalled him to the city."

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Von Bertrom was not surprised; he had breakfasted with Count Bracken.

"The Emperor will make her his wife as soon as she is found."

"His wife?" surprise dominated in Von Bertrom's tones.

"His wife, and our Empress. He laughed at me when I mentioned a morganatic marriage."

"Thank Heaven!"

"You sanction such a thing? You do not condemn the young fool?"

The Athol Chancellor pushed back his chair as he stood erect with a strange light burning in his faded eyes, and his jaw was resolutely set. "Yes, I sanction this seeming madness," he replied steadily. Can we have him stoop to a left-handed alliance? Do we wish the Austrian Ludwig to succeed him upon the throne? Can we afford to have him abdicate in our most precarious year? Max—Max, do not force him into a step which we shall live to rue! Give him time to come to his senses before trying to adopt any drastic measures."

Van Hellick, surprised beyond measure, could only glare. Had the very Gods gone mad?

"Where will you find one in this Empire to say him nay if he persists in this—you reckon without the national love of romance. He is the idol of the nation, and while I do not believe he would go against the wishes of the people in any way—he is Emperor Hadred, over and over, and over,—a good brother, a fearless King, but proud and obdurate to excess. If he will wed—he will wed, and whom he chooses."

"He shall wed whom the state chooses—or abdicate."

"Then he will abdicate. If Ferdinand insists on

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making Miss Huntington his wife, let her be his Empress, too."

Moments of tense silence followed, the Count's mouth worked spasmodically; his hands clutched the table with such force that his nails were white; finally he sprang to his feet, "Never! God knows a morganatic marriage—if permitted—would cripple us beyond recovery. But Empress of Auzenburg? Never!"

The Statesmen's glances met like flashes of light; then Van Hellick stooped to recover the letters, that had fallen to the floor; Von Bertrom drew on his gloves.

"I have voiced the sentiment of the people as well as my own," said Von Bertrom. "We prefer a woman of inferior rank as our Empress Queen, to having the hated Austrian Ludwig on the throne. In time Ferdinand might change, but that is the mere shadow of a hope. In this, he shows the same spirit as in all other matters—what he wants, he wants now; what he will do, he will do now. You know, and I know, that Ludwig as ruler would be a mere Austrian governor, and that is what he may anticipate if abdication is permitted. You may force Ferdinand to abdicate but you can not force Ludwig upon the people without bloodshed. I am on my way to the Palace; Good-morning."

When the Athol Chancellor had gone, Van Hellick ordered his car and hurried into his great coat. Sneering slightly, he thrust a letter carefully into an inner pocket. "Let Bracken and all the others be won over—we shall see who wins."

Von Bertrom's attitude was a keen disappointment.

For the first time in years, the great stone building, the center of postal service in the Auzen capital, felt

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the tread of Iron Mask. Half ashamed of being seen he hurriedly thrust a letter into one of the many receptacles, hastened back to the car, and drove about the city until ten o'clock. The chauffeur, distracted but patient, was delighted at the sharp command "To the Palace."

Van Hellick had calculated well. At ten o'clock, his Majesty usually gave attention to correspondence, so to the cheerful offices in the west wing Van Hellick directed his footsteps, and, to his satisfaction found the Emperor, and the assistant Secretary. At a sign from his Majesty, the latter withdrew, and the Emperor turned from innumerable letters to greet the Auzen Chancellor.

"Sire, most carelessly, I sent a letter to you which was intended for the Minister of Finance," the old man began. "It was of such moment to me that I must hurry over to explain my error, and therefore I beg the return of the missive."

The Emperor was astonished, for the Count was not a man to make mistakes like that. "The morning's mail has not been touched, Chancellor—let's institute a search. Suiting the action to the word, he drew the unopened letters toward him, and scanned them, one by one. The Chancellor was losing patience; was it possible that after all the rogue of an assistant secretary had failed to smuggle the letter to the bottom of the stack? Was the other not there? Suddenly, the Emperor exclaimed, and held out to the Chancellor an envelope, while with a half-smothered excuse, he tore open another, retained in his left hand.

Grimly, with half closed eyes, the Chancellor watched. And he, who read so accurately every

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change in another's face was not slow to mark the pallor of his Majesty's. He read the page again and then the hand with the letter fell to the desk.

"What is it? Has your Majesty received ill news? The Princess Lena——"

"Read that!" demanded the Emperor, extending the letter.

The Chancellor, with a final air of surprise, read again the letter, Wiebenovitch had given him. The letter itself was short and to the point, setting forth in regretful expressive words the necessity of severing the Emperor's attachment for her. She must leave him free she said, to follow the wishes of his advisers, and she implored forgiveness for her unworthy deception.

After the first shock, the Emperor tried to face the matter in a cool, sensible way, and sought to falsify the letter by every means at his command. Indeed its tone and the girl's constant allusions to state duties agitated him most painfully; but, perhaps there was some mistake even now. Why, since the envelope bore the stamp of the Auzen office, could the sender, if she were Cecil Huntington, not be found within the city? He had never seen her writing, but Huntington would know whether it were genuine, and Huntington was on the way.

"Well, what have you to say about that?"

"All, I have said before, your Majesty. Though you scorned my warnings, I was not convinced of the lady's sincerity. Though she saved your life, any one of your loving subjects would have done the same. If she felt any scruples as to your imperial sacrifices, she would not have remained here to inveigle you into her toils, and cause the state such uneasiness. Your Majesty must admit that old heads

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are correct occasionally. There is something back of this sudden repentance on the part of the lady."

The Emperor could not repress a smile. "Indeed Chancellor I am farther than ever from admitting the correctness of your opinion. As for her inveigling me, that is hardly just, I was more than willing to be inveigled. A few days ago you would have me believe the outrageous story of an elopement; this morning, you are ready to credit this letter. Why, since the letter was mailed in this city, can Cecil Huntington not be located? Can you answer that? Indeed, I firmly believe that some strange force of which we have no cognizance is at work, and in my mind those official papers, the tragedy at Wallburg, and this disappearance, are but links in a chain of misadventures that began with the attempt on my life."

"Miss Huntington has played an important part in all," suggested Van Hellick. Many women are connected with these so-called anarchist societies, I have heard."

If the Emperor understood the underlying meaning, he made no sign. "I suppose you kept the note, you offered me. Do you mind letting me have it? Thanks, I am expecting Mr. Huntington at any moment. Drop in later, Chancellor, and, perhaps, I shall have some news for you."

The Chancellor produced the note with which he had sought a few days before to disillusion the Emperor.

"Sire," he cried despairingly, "the Prince of Bohemia is on the point of withdrawing his offer! Surely you——"

"Let him do so. I am tired of having Princesses thrown at my head. I tell you, I have found the



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woman, I desire for my consort, and, by Heaven, if I can not wed her, I'll wed no one!"

"Prince Ludwig——"

"——may succeed me; that rests with you, and with the people. When I find Miss Huntington, she shall be my wife."

### **XVII.**

#### **HELP FROM AN UNEXPECTED QUARTER.**

During the interval between the time of the Auzen Chancellor's departure, and the announcement of Harold Huntington, the assistant secretary fidgeted uneasily in the outer office. Letters by the score were to be disposed of, and every minute of the morning was valuable, yet no summons came from his Royal master, and the assistant secretary was fain to wait and gnaw his nails in impatience. What news could the Chancellor have carried? Had the Emperor left the room? Where was Wiebenovitch? All these questions and many more agitated him, and, earnestly, he wished for Wiebenovitch, who treaded well the most precarious ground.

Beyond the closed doors, the Emperor sat as the Auzen Chancellor had left him, to brood over the letter, the morning mail had brought, and to calculate, to the minute, the arrival of the young Englishman. Huntington's attitude in the matter was of the uttermost importance. What would he think of the affair? What would he say? He would scorn the idea of an elopement, surely. But what theories would he advance?

The Emperor was not in the least certain concern-

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ing his own feelings in the matter. First of all he meant to unravel this mystery, and when the girl had been found—what then, indeed?

Only one thing was possible, and the sooner the struggle was over the better for all concerned. He would inform the Ministers of his unalterable determination to marry Cecil Huntington and put the matter to the vote of the people. There was little probability of any ultimatum save a unanimous assent to his wishes.

National pride was crushed at the thought of losing the Duchy. But he stood at the parting of the ways—one road led to grim sacrifice; the other to the most desirable of all earthly things. He who hesitates at a critical moment is lost; Ferdinand did not hesitate. Not for one instant did he allow himself to weigh the consequences.

“Monsieur Huntington, at last!”

Harold crossed the room with alacrity to greet the Emperor. The young Englishman’s honest sun-browned face was travel-worn and deeply troubled. The Emperor had judged that Harold would come to the Palace, and had ordered him to be admitted at any time. In spite of the trouble that had arisen, there was nothing strained in the greeting of the two men. The Emperor’s first question encouraged Harold to implicit frankness.

“You bring news of your sister?”

“No, oh, no! Would that I might say otherwise. But if your Majesty can spare a few moments, I have some matters I wish to discuss—some explanations to make.”

“Certainly,” said the Emperor.

“May I begin by asking a question?”

“A thousand if you like.”

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"Do you believe the story of her elopement?"

"No," emphatically.

"Then, I feel that I may speak freely. If you learned she had unintentionally deceived you—was even more noble than you had thought—would you forgive her?" Harold had forgotten self and his own interests; he thought only of the girl and what the faith of this strong, stubborn, self-willed, generous Monarch meant to her who had loved none other since childhood. His earnestness was impressive, his careless manner gone.

He had been very angry when, on arriving at the Embassy, he was told that Ferdinand was in ignorance of the girl's masquerade. Naturally, the first thought in the young Englishman's mind was a meeting with the Emperor, in which all would be explained, did his Majesty choose to heed.

Instantly, a change clouded the Emperor's hopeful face. "I am not good at riddles. Perhaps, frankness is the best plan. I am ready to listen."

"Then I shall be frank," replied Harold. "I mean to say that the young woman, you know as Cecil Huntington, is not my sister, but my cousin—Marie Cecil Huntington d'Auchausen."

The Emperor's countenance was a study. "I do not understand," he said coldly. "Why has Lord Ravenswood interested himself in a plan to deceive the ruler at whose Court he holds such an enviable place?"

"That is rather hard to explain," replied Harold recklessly; "in fact the most difficult part, and, if you are determined to think rather of the Ambassador's culpability than of Marie's, my mission is valueless."

"The Ambassador would have done well to explain in person instead of through an emissary——"

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"I am the emissary of no one," retorted Harold with spirit. "If you do not wish me to explain——"

"I do wish you to explain, Huntington," said the Emperor, "Begin."

Harold lost no time in plunging into his story. The Ambassador, he said, was much averse to their mad-cap plans and properly scolded Marie—but Helene and I took her part and what could my Lord do? Helene worships her, and, to me, she has been sister and playmate and——" his tanned face flushed a little—everything. Well, you know all that has occurred here as well or better than I. And I have no excuse to offer for either Marie or myself—we are wholly to blame. Marie meant to tell you everything to-day. Madame should have explained Saturday when you called at the Embassy."

In the silence that followed Harold was thinking how happy a fellow this King ought to be with the love of the most lovable girl in the world; the Emperor was trying to realize that his little English Cecil Huntington—so youthful and unsophisticated—was the great American beauty, who had dazzled Europe with her wealth and her charm. The Ambassador's offense was grave in a diplomatic way; he had foisted upon the court a young woman in disguise, but the thought uppermost in the Emperor's mind was that if ponderous, dignified old Lord Ravenswood had not been wheedled into the adventure, Cecil or Marie might not be his now—and therefore, he was by no means angry with the Ambassador.

Another change passed over the proud, dark face; the eyes were smiling, "I would like to tell the Ambassador exactly what I think of him—in a very informal way."

"And that?" said Harold.

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"He is a trump." Both laughed; Harold out of sheer happiness for the girl's sake, as this was an undeniable way of expressing partial if not total forgiveness. If my Lord could only have heard that!

"Then you are disposed to overlook our deception?"

"Yours—yes," the Emperor said slowly, "And Madame and my Lord's——"

"And Marie's——"

"I mean to make her pay for all of you," he answered whimsically, "and my price is high—Yes, Huntington, I am ready and willing, more than willing to forgive everything."

"I am happy," returned Harold simply, "And since I know your feelings in the matter, I tell you that in spite of the reports that have come to your ears, despite the malicious stories that are being circulated, Marie loves you as truly and devotedly as a woman can love a man, and she is true to you."

"Thank you," said the Emperor gratefully. "Your own loyalty is inspiring. Loving her as I do how could my faith be less. Of course, you are of her kindred, but love is stronger than blood."

"It is indeed," was the thoughtful reply. "You have found no clue—nothing which can help to unravel this mystery?"

For the first time Ferdinand remembered the two letters in his possession—the two supposed to be written by the girl. Silently, he handed both to his companion. Perusal was explanation enough.

Harold was excited and amazed. "To one unfamiliar with her penmanship, these would seem sufficient condemnation," he declared.

"There are peculiarities however. They are cleverly done!"

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The Emperor related his conversation with the Chancellor, the day he received the note.

"Where did he get it?" questioned Harold.

"I did not think to inquire."

"If your Majesty has no objection, I should like to retain the notes, a day or so."

"As you wish. You have thought of something——?"

"I have had a little experience in the detective line myself—I believe, I have a clue. Candidly, if I may so express my opinion, the gendarmes are utterly worthless to us." This was uttered with conviction.

The Emperor sent the young Islander one of the keen, searching glances, that made even Iron Mask uncomfortable.

"You know that the entire force is as wax in the hands of one, very high in your esteem. And, with me, you feel that he is not anxious for my cousin to be found."

The Emperor swung himself squarely about. "I can not misunderstand you. But the force is under the control of no one but myself—I brook no interference from anyone."

Harold looked re-assured. "Your Majesty, I am totally or almost totally in the dark, but I promise you that before many days we shall be able to lay our hands upon my cousin's abductor—I am positive we have a case of abduction—and more; this affair and the tragedy at Wallburg are linked in some mysterious way; when we solve one mystery we shall be able to solve the other. Until I learned of the murder, I was inclined to associate Grand Duke Nacoli with the matter, but now my convictions turn in another direction. Please ask no questions. My clue

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is too shadowy to admit of interrogations. But I shall keep you informed of all progress."

Wondering, but confident of Harold's ability, the Emperor suppressed the hundred eager queries that rose to his lips. "I understand that Mademoiselle d'Auchausen is a direct descendant of the Auzen de Cosas."

Harold nodded. "I intended some fitting acknowledgment of——" he hesitated over the name—"Marie's bravery, ere this. You know, of course, that a sovereign is not supposed to choose his wife from a lower rank than Countess—though some, like your own Henry VIII have ventured to disregard this rule. Countess was the title I had meant to bestow upon her, but I have reconsidered the matter. The title of the Cosas' is hers by right."

"But her name——" began Harold.

"That does not matter; from to-day, she is the Countess d'Auchausen. If Castle Adrien were not hers, I would bestow it upon her, but that pleasure has been forestalled. Marie," he repeated the name with lingering fondness, "I never realized before the beauty of that name."

The Englishman was inclined to smile. "What's in a name? Had hers been Gretchen, it would have been just as sweet."

The Emperor was amused. "Ach! you English are hard on our Auzen names," he said, "But you are correct—she is the flower of the world."

"Have the certificates for the loan been purchased?" the Englishman inquired hurriedly.

"No, unfortunately."

"Not unfortunately, if I may contradict. I wish to purchase the entire quota for my cousin, if agreeable to you."

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Surprised beyond measure, the Emperor was dumb. This announcement was almost past belief. Marie had saved his life, had brought to light a conspiracy, which might have undermined the throne—and now, she offered to save Annaistane.

"Harold," he said at last—"for I feel privileged to call you so—what can I say? I am not going to try to express my gratitude. I already owed her more than I can ever repay."

"You accept?"

"Gladly. Indeed our finances are not in such state that I can refuse."

"Then go at once to the Minister of Finance."

"You will be a welcome visitor. Will you say to Count Bracken that the Cabinet meets here within the hour. And Huntington—we can not—we must not let another day pass in fruitless efforts. I will go to any lengths to throw light upon this mystery. Indeed the suspense is more than I can endure."

Count Bracken was not long in obeying the Imperial summons. He wished to be the first to congratulate the Emperor on the good fortune, and to offer assurances of friendship.

"Your Majesty," was his greeting—"my heartiest good wishes! You were always the most fortunate of men."

"—a good, friendly chat before the Ministers arrive, Bracken. Come tell me what you think of it all."

Count Bracken rubbed his eyes. "I am still uncertain whether I am not dreaming. I have read of these fabulous millionaires of the New World but—well, I am simply astounded. I can not reconcile this American heiress with the charming little lady we have learned to adore. How Madame has tricked



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us—and the sly Countess! Had she an inkling, she has hugged it to herself. Women! women!—yet what would the universe be without them?”

“Do you think this revelation will in any degree affect public opinion, Bracken?”

“Most certainly, Sire. The loan’s being offered by her in the midst of our difficulties; the splendid heroism she evidenced in your behalf—why, Sire, the people loved her before, but now she will be their idol. Indeed, in present circumstances, this is the best thing that could happen—for your sake, and hers. I earnestly hope that she will make as good a consort as you deserve. I believe you know your own mind and have weighed well the consequences. And we——” he shrugged his shoulders, “we do not love Prince Ludwig.”

The Emperor knew that beneath the statesman’s ready co-operation there was real sympathy. “I wish Van Hellick would accept the inevitable with equally good grace.”

“He knows?”

“I told him a few days ago.”

“And Von Bertrom?”

“Has expressed the same views to Van Hellick as to you this morning. He told me all Van Hellick said.”

But Count Van Hellick did not know the story first related by Huntington, nor did he know of the loan. And both the Emperor and Count Bracken were eagerly awaiting the old man’s arrival, as they chatted, friendly, with the gathering Ministers.

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### **XVIII.**

#### **THE MINISTERS.**

After leaving the Palace, the Auzen Chancellor, as a last resort, ordered his chauffeur to drive to the British Embassy.

On arriving, he was told that her Ladyship would see him, and, too impatient to remain seated, he paced the length of the drawing-room. Steeled to meet protests, anger, even tears, he received a distinct shock at the appearance of Lady Ravenswood, who was buoyed up by suppressed excitement.

With her hands clasped upon the carved back of a chair, an exasperating smile lingering upon her face—exasperating, because it seemed almost mocking—Lady Ravenswood listened patiently while Van Hiellick pictured with all the eloquence at his command, the humiliation and the disadvantages of an alliance between the Emperor and her cousin.

"Madame," he said vehemently, "surely you see that I am in the right. In a year's time, or even less the Emperor will regret this folly, though now he cannot be convinced of such a possibility. And when that time comes what humiliation your cousin must be forced to endure! At best, the Emperor can offer her only a morganatic marriage—an arrangement I feel sure is not commended by you English. To talk of the crown and of making her Empress of our land is little short of madness—a wild, impossible whim—the people will never consent to such proceeding. In the other case should she accept a left-

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handed alliance, it would bring distrust and hatred upon her because the Emperor's marriage is a matter of prime importance to every one of his subjects. Think of the Queen-consorts of our land, in former days! Is a mere girl, untitled, obscure, foreign to all our ways, used only to the wild heaths and rugged country-life of Scotland, a fit mate for a ruler of our Emperor's stamp—an Empress able to hold her own with the Royalty of Europe? Your cousin, Madame, is charming, but she is no suitable consort for our Emperor."

"I quite agree with you, Count. An obscure, foreign girl, like Cecil Huntington, is no fit mate for a man like your Emperor."

"Then, Madame," he stammered, "then—I am to understand that you will do your part in averting this mesalliance?"

"I will give you all the assistance in my power to prevent Cecil Huntington's (the Chancellor noticed the emphasis on the name) becoming your Sovereign's wife—when she is found."

After assurances of his deep anxiety at the disappearance of the young woman and his willingness to aid in her recovery, the Chancellor departed.

Van Hellick entertained serious doubts about the Secretary's story, and the authorship of the letter, sent to the Emperor, but he was quick to grasp anything which would tend to disenchant the infatuated young man. Wiebenovitch held some very important knowledge in his possession—of that, the Chancellor was certain. How culpable the man had been in all his trouble, the Chancellor would not conjecture, so long as the Secretary was serviceable. It was now time to return to the Palace. What new project would the Emperor have afoot? "We shall see,"

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said Iron Mask to himself, and aloud to the chauffeur—"To the Palace."

Arriving there, he dismissed the car, and made his way to the Emperor's private offices. Van Hellick was aware of voices, as he neared the sliding-doors, and on entering was surprised to find some members of the Cabinet. He had thought to find the Emperor alone.

The Emperor was seated at the claw-footed table, his hands clasped on its polished surface; Count Bracken stood to the right, conversing in low tones. Von Bertrom, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the Minister of the Interior were gathered in a group near a window. Upon the appearance of the Auzen Chancellor, the other statesmen became silent, and the Emperor motioned all to seats about the board.

Van Hellick bowed to the Emperor and greeted the others with a curt nod, as he took the accustomed seat.

"My Ministers, I have summoned you to meet me here this morning in order to discuss with you a matter of much importance to me and to our country." The Emperor sank back in his chair, his hands stretched upon its arms, his head bent a little forward. Just ten years ago, that very day, he had met them here for the first time as their King, and from this same careless apathy of poise he had startled all into a feverish terror or activity. More than one recalled that first meeting.

An expectant straightening of shoulders and adjusting of eye-glasses followed, they waited for him to proceed.

"To begin with," he said slowly, "I am much gratified to inform you that a few moments since, the entire number of Certificates issued for the loan, were

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secured by Covell and Huntington, the English bankers, representing Marie d'Auchausen."

Exclamations of surprise and joy followed the announcement. A heart-felt sigh of relief came from Von Bertrom; Van Hellick alone said nothing, though he was not ill pleased with the news.

"But, Sire, six-million crowns! I know the lady is considered rich, but——" the Minister of Foreign Affairs was unable to hide his astonishment.

The Emperor almost smiled, "I have heard from a reliable source that her wealth is fabulous. She has generously offered to extend the loan, if, at the appointed time, we find ourselves unable to pay." He listened eagerly to the animated discussion which ensued.

"Don't you think," he said at last, "don't you feel, that we should show our gratitude and good-will by conferring some honor upon the young lady in question? She has, as you know, purchased her old ancestral castle in the South and intends making our land her home. Do you not think the ancient title of her house would be a fitting acknowledgment of her kindness?"

"I was about to ask your Majesty's permission to offer that suggestion," said Count Bracken heartily.

"I agree with your Majesty," assented the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

"And I, Sire," cried the Minister of the Interior.

Van Hellick was sullenly indifferent. He thought of the wealthy American beauty and ground his teeth. Had the Emperor only fancied the American it would have been less scandalous. But Cecil Huntington—bah!

"My Ministers," resumed the Emperor, "there is another matter by no means second in importance

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to that which we have been discussing. It has much to do with the molding of our future. Before to-day, I have hesitated to broach the subject, but, now that we are again unincumbered, I feel authorized in proceeding." He paused waiting for the words to take effect. "I believe that you wish me happiness—that you care that much for me. I was hurled into this weighty position at a time when youth is care-free and thoughtless. I was obliged to assume the cares that made my father's crown like lead; I found that I must think—life was no longer divided between school and sports; I was obliged to exercise the training I had received. Ten years have passed since the day I assumed the crown—and, in all that time, I believe, no one can justly accuse me of neglect of my duties or of selfishness. I ask you to consider all this before you censure my present attitude—before you say yea or nay."

"Lena's marriage to Gustave was not brought about for political reasons, but from her own inclination. Gustave is neither powerful nor wealthy, and, as you know, according to the law of his land, on her wedding day, she renounced her right to our throne. In the event of my remaining unmarried, the crown will pass to my cousin, Prince Ludwig. In the event of my contracting a left-hand marriage—it is Ludwig's; in the event of my dying without an heir—it is Ludwig's. I wish to see the succession insured to the House of Hohenstauffenn—I believe the people desire that, but I am not willing to wed any one chosen for me, even in order to secure this. Had I never met any one for whom I cared you would doubtless have been confronted with Ludwig as heir-apparent, for I might never have thought of marriage, but, as matters now stand, I wish to place my crown where

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I have bestowed my heart. I ask your approbation of my wedding with Miss Huntington."

All were expecting such statement, but yet when the words came they were in the nature of a shock. Only Count Bracken retained his confident air—he could afford to study those about him. Twice the Minister of Foreign Affairs seemed on the point of speaking, but, on encountering the sharp eyes of the Auzen Chancellor, he fidgeted uneasily in his seat and remained dumb. The Minister of the Interior waited for another to venture an opinion before committing himself. Von Bertrom met his sovereign's gaze with clear, unflinching eyes.

"Well?" the Emperor questioned sharply.

Von Bertrom cleared his throat, "Your Majesty speaks plainly, and, I know, wishes the same of us. As for myself, I feel that your Majesty should marry, but—God save us from a left-hand alliance."

"Then that means——"

"Your Majesty's will be done," said the old statesman simply.

"And you Bracken?"

"The Baron has expressed my feelings Sire. Surely, Auzenburg can be as generous to our beloved Monarch as Athol. If you will wed her, make her our Empress."

"Müller?"

"Where men such as the venerable Athol Chancellor, and the estimable Minister of Finance are willing to concede, can I do less? I am with your Majesty."

"And you, Vi-Count?"

The Minister of the Interior coughed nervously, and glanced at the Auzen Chancellor. "I—I—Your Majesty, this is deplorable! The laws of our country

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—our traditions—But I can not find it in my heart to go against your wishes.”

The Emperor slowly faced, rigid, grimly-scowling Van Hellick. “What have you to say, Count?”

“I say, your Majesty, that I can not give my consent to something which I do not sanction.”

“Then the issue goes to the nation, and the nation failing acquiescence in my desire, I shall abdicate. The words were calmly spoken, but evinced unalterable determination.

Van Hellick suddenly leaned forward—if the Emperor contracted a left-handed alliance now, there was still the possibility of a royal wife for him, in the future. Growing weary of the girl, he would doubtless awaken to the advantages of a new marriage and cast her aside. Many Princesses of the Blood would be willing enough to overlook this scandal—“Your Majesty, I readily agree to a morganatic marriage, if you persist in the matter. Such an arrangement is against my better judgment—but I submit.”

“Morganatic?—Then you favor Ludwig’s succession?”

Van Hellick started. “No, Sire, I did not mean to convey that impression, but I do mean that my firm belief is that in a short time you will weary of the alliance you are now determined to consummate—and will regret the folly of to-day.”

Van Hellick deemed the moment at hand when persuasion was inexpedient. If force must be brought to bear to save the Emperor from himself, now was the opportunity—Ferdinand must not believe himself victorious. If one man were strong enough to remain unmovable the other statesmen would soon swing into line.



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The Emperor's answer was slow and slightly drawling. A blaze of temper would have been more acceptable to Van Hellick than this irritating self-assurance. Ferdinand was curiously hard toward those who were hard toward him.

"Many years have passed since such an alliance, as you suggest, stained the annals of our House—stained, because it was a disgrace. Has any one here forgotten the day that my uncle, handsome, ambitious in the springtime of his life, implored the consent of the Emperor, my father, to his marriage with a lovely but untitled Austrian girl? When told that a marriage, which would elevate the lady to his rank, was out of the question, he was in despair. At the instance of one of my father's advisers, a morganatic union was proposed, with the stipulation that, upon the day following, my uncle was to wed a Princess of the Blood. The first part of the plan was carried out, but utterly averse to the second alliance, both young people attempted to fly the country. They were intercepted by command of the Emperor, who had been warned, and my Uncle ended his own life."

All eyes were riveted upon the Auzen Chancellor who had become ashy-grey.

"To the hour my father died, he never forgave himself for the tragedy caused by that command. He continually lamented his brother and would gladly have recalled those hasty words, and consented to the desired alliance." The Emperor's face had lost the traces of anger and was very grave.

"As for myself," he continued evenly, "I do not know what has influenced me on this subject—partly the re-constructed ideas of my father—partly my mother's saddened life. You, who served both, know

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that neither was happy, and I believe that the mother's loved memory will soften the sternest hearts towards the son. I scorn the proposal of a morganatic marriage! Ah, Chancellor, you knew when you offered this subterfuge, how England regards such measures. I would not offer the woman of my choice such a position and, if I did, she would deservedly despise me."

"Kings are not to be despised," interposed Iron Mask coldly. And such an honor from you——"

"Would be the greatest dishonor I could offer. No! I will wed Miss Huntington; but not in your way——"

"You can not abdicate."

"I do not wish to abdicate."

"Then why this threat?"

"I have made no threat," asserted the Emperor calmly, "I have told you plainly my intentions, and I shall abide by what I have said."

The face of the Auzen Chancellor was inflexible. He neither spoke nor moved.

The Emperor noting Van Hellick's determined attitude, addressed himself to the others. "I thank you most heartily for your fidelity. Now I have a small piece of news to communicate, which I am certain will be surprising. Mademoiselle Cecil Huntington is Marie d'Auchausen—or Countess d'Auchausen since we have agreed to restore to her that title."

"Sire, what is this you tell us?" exclaimed Von Bertrom.

"The American—impossible!" exclaimed Müller excitedly.

"It is true," said the Emperor exulting in the joyful surprise depicted on some of the grave faces.

Van Hellick arose, leaning with one hand on the

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back of his chair. All eyes were expectantly turned to him.

"Your Majesty has indeed astounded everyone. But, notwithstanding this startling revelation—I can not yield. I can not give my consent to the ruination of our Empire—the lowering of our standard in the eyes of the world. And, your Majesty, will encounter not only the antagonism of an old man, who has no thought save the welfare of the Nation, but will encounter, also, the invincible antagonism of the Church."

The Emperor, too, had arisen. "The Church——?"

"Yes, the Church—The lady is not a Roman Catholic. Your Majesty may over-rule my feeble objections—but you can not disregard the power of the Church."

Count Bracken, quick of wit, seeing the helpless, unquestioning despair upon his ruler's face, took his stand at the Emperor's side. "His Majesty feels no misapprehension concerning the Church," he interposed quickly. "Where Love leads a man will follow, and a woman too for that matter. Countess Marie will doubtless say as did Ruth of old: 'Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.' Since she has offered her life in defense of our King, and her fortune in behalf of our people for his sake, there is little doubt that she will make all necessary concessions. Where there is no sacrifice, there is no love. Our Emperor will have conceded much, and Church and State are no longer inseparable in Auzenburg."

The meeting broke up precipitately. Van Hellick went forth with redoubled determination to thwart the Emperor, and with tumultuous rage toward Count Bracken. So Lady Ravenswood had been willing enough to co-operate in snatching Cecil Hunt-

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ington from the throne! And Countess Alis had known all along. They were diabolical in their machinations, and the Emperor was mad!

Count Bracken remained with the Emperor to assume the arrangement of the appeal to the people, and the conversion of the Diet. He advised the Emperor to interview Cardinal Angelano at once upon the question of religion, and through Count Bracken's advice was made public the curt dismissal of Wiebenovitch from the Royal service. Count Bracken had taken the whip-hand, and a bitter duel of words and actions was to ensue between him and the Auzen Chancellor.

Count Bracken had no sooner left the Palace than the Emperor went in search of the Cardinal.

Angelano habitually spent little time in the capital city; he had divided his leisure between Athol and the Duchy, only appearing in Auzenburg at the wedding of Princess Lena and Prince Gustave. Like Van Hellick, he was able to learn from some inexhaustible source everything of importance transpiring in the capital.

The distance from the Palace terraces to those of the Cardinal's residence was but a stone's throw, and Ferdinand noticing that the rain had ceased, went out into the damp sweet air, and crossed the gardens with a rapidity which almost startled Captain Von Wieben whom he encountered upon the way. The sun burst out in a golden glow of beams, just as the Emperor caught sight of the Cardinal, who, lost in meditation, was leaning against a massive column of the portico, drinking in the earthy moisture with the appreciation of a Nature lover. The flaming red of his robes made the sturdy figure clearly distinct; the attitude was impressive, the face was

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raised, and one hand was holding a small volume; for a moment, he had stepped forth to enjoy the sunshine, and under the charm of the fragrant ether, had fallen into a day-dream.

In the blue of the empyrean, a chapel stood, as real as though it were fashioned of carara marble, instead of being the baseless substance of fleeting visions. The chapel seemed decorated with rare white lilies, and, at the foot of the altar, a woman was kneeling, her flowing robes rivaling the flowers in purity, her hands clasped upon a gilded stool, her face upturned toward a window of rare coloring, and a halo of light radiating from the glory of her hair. Her name he had forgotten. Two years had passed since she had crossed the path of his life—two years of work and study and new faces and scenes had obliterated all but the vision. She was the Saint Cecilia that Guronde's masterhand had put upon canvas in the London Chapel of the Crossings.

A foot-fall interrupted the dream; the Emperor crossed the terrace.

"Your Majesty, too, has sought the air? Will you not come within?"

"No, no, Father;" the Emperor spoke hurriedly. "Let us remain here. I have come to you for advice on a very important subject." Angelano straightened, his body bent forward, his gaze fixed questioningly upon the young man's face.

"There is a matter about which I desire to have my way—I must have my way, and I am sore perplexed. If there were something which you wanted more than any other in all the world, what would you do?"

"If I were your Majesty, I would have that thing—that is if 'twere right to do so."

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"But, if there were obstacles?"

"I would overcome them."

"What if religion stood in the way?"

"Oh—h," ejaculated Angelano, with troubled lines corrugating his brow. After a moment's pause, he spoke quietly: "My son, if you will be plain, perhaps I can see a way to help you."

"The facts are simply these," said Ferdinand slowly, "the woman I love is not of your holy faith."

Perhaps the Cardinal half expected this announcement; at all events, he was not surprised. "And to become your Consort, she must first become of that faith." He studied the ground thoughtfully. "Have you spoken to her on this subject?"

"No."

"Why not resort to persuasion? Perhaps she may be willing to adopt our faith."

"Mademoiselle d'Auchausen——"

The Cardinal started, "Mademoiselle d'Auchausen!" he cried.

"——is a Protestant—according to Count Van Hellick."

A light broke upon Angelano's face as he again spoke the name which had so long eluded him. "Mademoiselle d'Auchausen!" he repeated.

The Emperor started in his turn.

"You knew?" he questioned.

"I met Mademoiselle d'Auchausen about two years ago. But how is it—how did your Majesty meet——"

"Then the story has not yet reached you? She came here incognito—as Cecil Huntington."

"The lady who saved your life! How can it be that I never encountered her?—But I have been here so little of late."

"About two years ago, I was in London, if your

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Majesty will recollect. I have often thought of the young lady, but I have the common failing of forgetting names. I knew Lord and Lady Ravenswood. He had just been recalled from the United States, and Lady Ravenswood had presented her cousin at the Court of St. James. The American girl took London by storm. Every one agreed that a more radiant beauty had never made her bow to the Queen. Lord Ravenswood entertained lavishly. Mademoiselle d'Auchausen's pursuits, her comings and goings were remarked as though she were of the Royalty. Guronde insisted on painting her as Saint Cecilia, and I saw her several times with Lady Ravenswood at the Crossings Chapel where the work was done. Did Count Van Hellick follow the advice I gave him this morning?"

"What advices?" asked the Emperor wonderingly.

"I told him a story," replied the Cardinal, amusement welling up in his eyes. "At an unearthly hour this morning who should insist on seeing me but Van Hellick. I had just risen preparatory to making my usual visits to the hospitals, and was seated before the fire, sipping my coffee, and listening to the rain, when his message was brought up. I had an idea of the matter he had come to discuss and I wasn't unwilling. He appeared rather haggard and not in the best of humor I assure you. He began at once to tell me what I should do in the event of your persisting in marrying an adventuress—an obscure foreign girl, as he styled her, adding, that he knew I could influence you in the matter. He told me what your Majesty had said to him on the subject, and repeated what he had heard of her elopement. I listened patiently, and, when he had done, I said: 'Count, I am going to tell you a story. What you

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will think of it, I do not know, but, if I were in your place, I should follow the moral it teaches. Though it deals with people and things unreal, it explains the predicament in which Auzenburg finds herself to-day."

The Emperor listened curiously to the story which Angelano told in a style peculiarly his own.

"Once upon a time—long before any people, now living, remember—there reigned in Fairyland a Queen who had one son. He was handsome (as a prince should be); he was good; he was brave, and the Queen loved him to distraction. As a Prince should do, he fell in love, but not with a princess. She was a maid of mortal birth, marvelously beautiful, sweet-tempered, and passionately infatuated with the prince. In vain the Queen wailed and implored; the prince refused to give up the maid. A Council was summoned to discuss the matter. After days of wrangling, the wise men decided if the Prince persisted in this obstinate course he should be changed into a flower until he repented. The Prince refused to heed and the sentence was executed. The flower was placed in the palace garden, but no sunlight came to warm the fragile blossom and it drooped and died.

"Seeing there was no heir to the throne, the gnomes, who had so long coveted the beautiful mountains and fertile valleys fell upon the country from all sides, and rent the land into a hundred tidbits to satisfy their petty greed."

The Cardinal did not glance at the Emperor, but stared into space with the innocence of expression that always characterized him when narrating anything unusually daring.



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The Emperor ignored the story, but his reply proved him not unappreciative.

"This morning I put the question of my marriage before the Ministers."

Slowly, Angelano leaned to pluck a flower from the urn at his side; gently he fingered the bright petals. "A coincidence," he murmured—"a coincidence! Mademoiselle d'Auchausen—I was thinking of her when you came to me. Far from hospital work and daily routine, my thoughts had wandered to London. I was thinking of the artist, Gurondê, and endeavoring to recall the long lost and elusive name."

"—little guessing that some day she might be Empress of Auzenburg," added the young Monarch.

The Cardinal's curiosity was aroused. "All the world loves a lover," and he was no exception. With skillful questioning, he drew from the Emperor the story of the official papers and of that disappearance.

Being a man of keen perception and ready imagination, the Cardinal was able to read between the lines and obtain a fair idea of the situation; it was a love story, pure and simple, and Count Van Hellick's views and suspicions were both prejudiced and unfounded. At last the Cardinal spoke:

"My son, were a certain Russian noble now living, all the world would lay this abduction—for I am positive it is such—at his door. Since he had departed from the earthly temple ere this enormity was perpetrated the mystery deepens, yet centers irrevocably around the persons intimately connected with him in this life."

"The valet has likewise disappeared."

"But your private Secretary?"

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The Emperor started. "I dismissed him from my service, a few moments since."

"Dismissed!" cried the Cardinal with the first evidence of excitement. "Why so long as he remained in your service, you had excellent opportunity of observing his movements."

"And he, mine," responded the Emperor. "No, Father, if he is in the employ of foreigners—and such I am certain is the case—he well conceals his schemes. Until that Russian came to our city, I never knew Wiebenovitch to let slip a word or do aught in any way which might lead to his own undoing. He did his work faithfully, and apparently minded his own affairs."

"And Grand Duke Nacoli?"

A shadow crossed the Emperor's face. "He is a prince of the Blood."

The Cardinal no longer wore an air of calm; he was excited, at what seemed to him a positive clue. "The woman—Wiebenovitch's confederate?"

"Nothing is known of her. She must be perfectly familiar with the Court; no one attends the balls uninvited."

"Mademoiselle d'Auchausen said nothing of her?—nothing which could lead to her detection?"

The Emperor pondered a moment. "I believe she said that the woman's voice was familiar."

"Ah—h! ejaculated the Cardinal. "Does not Wiebenovitch show preference for any of the Court beauties?"

"No—that is——" the Emperor hesitated. "I have been informed that he and Lady Xenia are good friends. But, of course, that does not amount to anything. Lady Xenia is above suspicion."

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### XIX.

#### HAROLD MAKES SOME DISCOVERIES.

No sooner had Harold left the place than he began his round of investigations—these investigations up to a point were more than satisfactory. Learning that the opera star Cecile de Rambrant was at the hotel Hohenstauffenn, he hastened thither, confided to her his troubles, showed her the note asking Von Berewin to meet the writer at St. Joseph's hospital—and learned this: the note had been penned by her. The note was signed "Cecil" and the Chancellor had declared it to be written by Miss Huntington. He knew Von Berewin to be her brother, so the knowledge had given him an inspiration and a clue to clear up part of the evidence damning his cousin.

Harold's next move was to seek Xenia Van Hellen. He knew that Xenia loved Wiebenovitch and he reasoned thus, loving him and having that fiery Auzen temper, the story of his former life—before he came to Auzenburg, would arouse her jealousy. At last he had placed the Italian—his real name, his former marriage, the desertion of his wife for an Italian court beauty (also married) all this he told her so convincingly, so earnestly that it were calculated to burn her heart to flame.

Xenia, indifferent to all appearances, queried why he had not told this story to his Majesty. Harold replied, and truthfully, that he had just discovered the man's identity. Harold was certain that if Wie-

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benovitch knew of his cousin's abduction, Xenia also knew. It was thus he tried to play upon her to betray the Italian. But, alas, he counted his efforts a failure. Xenia was inclined to deride him. Not until Harold mentioned the fact of Wiebenovitch's departure—banishment from Auzenburg—did she heed. Then thoughts of the Italian beauty, to whom he would doubtless return, tore her heart. Harold called himself some uncomplimentary names, and cursed the failure of his carefully-laid scheme.

Xenia was hardly conscious of what she said or did. She was gay—but her gaiety was strained. Her only thought was to cover the ugly wound she had received.

Once free of the Englishman's companionship, she hurried blindly homeward, and on reaching her rooms flung herself upon a couch and sobbed out the grief in her heart.

After the long, shuddering sobs quieted, her pride surmounted everything. She sprang erect and stared about the apartment with fury in her eyes. A miniature upon the dressing-table attracted her attention; she took it from its stand and dashed it to the floor where the glass shattered into tiny fragments. Surveying the ruins, she stood, with heaving bosom and clinched hands—a tragic picture. "Ach, how I hate him! I hate him!—the wretch, the brute!" she cried. "He has made me his tool—strengthened to the tasks set me by the clasp of his hand!—lured from height to height of treachery by the promising beacon-light of love. And he thought that he would leave to-night—drop out of my life entirely—that if I detected him, the strength of my love would hold me silent—after what I have witnessed, my God!"

The torture of that exclamation was pathetic. Some

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nature's there are that can stand anything, everything but infidelity. From Xenia's words we know that some memories haunted her, but these however appalling grew dim in the light of this new grief. For the time, the thought of the beauty in Italy, awaiting the Secretary's return, drove her mad. She paced the length of the apartment, talking to herself between sobs.

"Holy Mother! to think I have been such a dupe. I—I—useful only in intrigue, in treachery, in dishonesty. To think of all I have risked—all I have forfeited—and to this end! Ach, that day at Wallburg my eyes should have been opened, but I convinced myself it was in his own defense. Blind fool that I have been, I could, I could kill him—I will kill him. He shall never be false to another."

She snatched a curiously-carved dagger from the table, but, as she straightened, a change overspread her features, her lips parted, her eyes grew hard as flint. Her revenge would be doubly sweet—it only awaited her asking, the jeweled stiletto slipped from her fingers in obedience to the voice that whispered—"Tell the Emperor."

The Englishman had declared he would say nothing since the Secretary was dismissed. It would be her pleasure—her revenge to betray him.

Her own implication in the Secretary's treachery, did not disturb her. She had reached, at a bound, the pinnacle whence caution, fidelity, reason, all self restraint is dashed to the ground. She was conscious only of the voice that reiterated "revenge." Wiebenovitch meant to leave that night; she could not see the Emperor a moment too soon. With feverish haste she donned a hat and snatching a veil from a box sped from the apartment. Her hair was dis-

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arranged, her eyes swollen and red from weeping, but she neither realized nor cared.

In the lower corridor, she ran full-tilt into her sometime guardian, Count Van Hellick.

"I had just inquired your whereabouts," he began, but desperate Xenia cut him short.

"I—I am in a hurry. What do you want?"

"What do I want?—a nice greeting, 'pon my word! Where are you going?" He caught her arm as she strove to pass.

"I am going—oh, never mind where," she jerked out. "I have no time to listen to you. You never come here except when you want to upbraid me and quarrel about my allowance. Let me pass, I say."

"That is exactly what I am not going to do."

The Count sternly held his position, "I have not come to quarrel as you inelegantly express 'reproving extravagance.' All I desire is for you to answer one question."

"Well, ask it!" she snapped.

"Where is Wiebenovitch?"

"As if I knew—I'm not his keeper."

"I tell you I want to know where he is."

"I don't know, and I don't care—damn Wiebenovitch!"

Staggered by such profanity, Van Hellick's grip relaxed, and, before he could intercept her again, she was gone.

Harold had been told by Otto Von Wieben, the Emperor's aide de camp, that the Secretary was dismissed and was going to leave the city that same evening. This news was startling to Lady Xenia who previously knew nothing of the dismissal.

Heedless of the pedestrians who stared surprisedly, she sped into the street and toward the Palace. If

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the Emperor were only there! She prayed that he might be.

Feverish though her brain was with jealousy, Xenia recalled Wiebenovitch's every allusion to the disappearance of Miss Huntington, and linked these important hints with her own pitiful story, in a way calculated to arouse a stoic. She realized—and yet she did not fathom the consequences of her intended revelations. Unbelievable, as it may appear, between love and hate, there is but a step—the intensity of one passion is evidenced by the intensity of the other. Xenia had loved Wiebenovitch with all the fervor of her race, but now, hate and love were mingled in a volcanic upheaval of tempestuous indignation. To keep him from the glorious Italian Princess, to shatter his dreams of a power shared with another, her bitterest enemy—this was her sole desire. Afterward—but one never realizes until afterward the mistakes, the misrepresentations made under the galling fire of jealousy. That her own life might pay for her disclosures to the Emperor did not once occur to her.

On the Palace steps a Cuirassier barred her progress, but Xenia was not to be put aside.

"I must see the Emperor," she pleaded, "I can not go away without seeing him. Captain Johann! ah, you will intercede for me, I know."

The last was addressed to the Captain of the Guard. Johann von Wieben brushed aside the Cuirassier and spoke kindly to the half-frantic girl.

The Emperor and the Cardinal were still alone upon the terrace. Both turned simultaneously upon the approach of the Captain and his protégée.

Before the Captain would explain the intrusion,

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Xenia rushed forward and threw herself on her knees at the Emperor's feet.

"Your Majesty, I beg you to listen to me," she cried, catching the edge of his cape. "I may assist you in finding Miss Huntington. I am a traitor—a traitor—I will tell you all I know of their miserable schemes, whatever you may do to me."

Ferdinand was surprised beyond measure at these incoherent words, and at the tragic change in one, who for several years had been considered the most arrogant, self-centered coquette at Court. The mention of Marie had won his ear, as she purposed, and he was sympathetic, for Lady Xenia had always held his admiration.

"Arise, Mademoiselle," he said kindly, "arise, and try to calm yourself. I am eager to hear something of Mar—of Miss Huntington."

"No—no! let me kneel—you will send me to the tower when I explain. Ach!" she groaned, covering her face with her hands, but, after a moment flung them out in an encompassing gesture. "He is a traitor—a liar—a thief—a spy—everything that is detestable and mean. He is not even the person that he pretends to be. He has betrayed me—he has betrayed you. Ach! now I hate him, I hate him!"

The Emperor, still mystified, stared down at the impassioned face. "Who is this villain, Mademoiselle? Why should I send you to the tower—you who have always been the jewel of the court? Please speak plainly, for I do not understand."

"Arioso — the Secretary — Wiebenovitch" — she sobbed, and then the whole story came out in a flood of coherent, yet tempestuous words. The explanation of the Secretary's identity she related just as the Englishman had told her. And then the hardest



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part came—far harder than she had realized. She struggled to her feet and leaned against the parapet for support. "Your Majesty is aware that some very important official papers were stolen. Miss Huntington returned them to you. Perhaps you suspected Wiebenovitch. If you did you were correct. It was necessary for him—for his employers to know their contents—he is in the pay of a powerful man in the Ottoman government. Every morsel of important news discovered here was sent to this Turk. I—fool that I have been—have used what little money and influence I possess to help him."

The Emperor and the Cardinal looked at one another.

"I wonder," spoke Angelano almost under his breath, "where Wiebenovitch ever made the acquaintance of Grand Duke Nacoli."

With a little inarticulate shriek, Lady Xenia shrank against her support. Her eyes were dilated, her face blanched. "Wallburg," she breathed to the astonishment of her companions. The Cardinal quickly stepped forward and took her hands. "What do you know of Wallburg, my daughter?" he questioned gently.

For moments, Xenia seemed in a daze, and then, as the Cardinal released her, she stood erect and threw out her hands in an expression of horror, as one does who would ward off a blow, or thrust away some terrifying sight. "Ach, what a wonderful, wonderful morning it was—and to be terminated by such a horror. I never felt in a better, more cheerful humor than when I dressed for a ride, intending to visit Göttmutter as I had not been out to the old place in so long. Why I evaded him, and—and that other on the roadway, I do not know. Perhaps I

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could have taken him back to the capital—but instead of riding boldly up to them, I turned into another road. Ach, the torture of that memory! It is written indelibly upon my brain. I can see him now—not the Antonio I had known, but a very devil.”

The girl shuddered again, and blanched even more perceptibly. “I saw it all—the glasses—the decanter. I heard the Grand Duke beg him for wine, and Antonio’s allusion to a headache, and the remedy he always carried. I can see again the dread sparkle of that vial—the bubbling wine—and then, ach, God of Horrors—he changed the glasses before giving the Grand Duke the wine. A little later he brushed past me, huddled as I was in the curtained doorway. Something hard and glassy had fallen near my feet—it was the vial. Mechanically, I stooped and held it up. I realized that it was the same he had laughingly showed me the previous day, saying that this was his gate of escape were he ever detected and caught—some mysterious South American drug that brings death which one can not detect from sleep.”

“So,” said the Cardinal, “it was Wiebenovitch himself who killed Nacoli.”

The trance-like expression had passed, and Xenia, realizing that she had utterly and irrevocably damned the man who had won her love, startled and threw out her hands. Perhaps, after all, the Secretary had slain in self-defense, but now his life would answer for the crime—and her own. “Ach, what have I done—what have I done?” she wailed, “Your Majesty I beg you to grant him fair trial.” Scarcely were the words uttered before she fell, an inanimate heap upon the terrace.

Together, the Emperor and Captain Von Wieben, who had lingered at a respectful distance, bore her

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into the Cardinal's Palace. Servants were summoned, the Court physician arrived in due time; all was excitement and confusion. The Emperor dispatched Captain Von Wieben with some very terse instructions, and the outcome of that officer's investigation proved Lady Xenia's story.

Lady Xenia's apartments were thoroughly searched. The vial, with a few drops of its precious contents, was found, and also some letters, undoubtedly from Wiebenovitch—letters which convicted several members of the Court. Wholesale arrests were made in the next quarter of an hour, yet the Secretary was not located. A systematic search for him was instituted throughout the city but with no result. He too, it seemed, had disappeared.

Xenia, when sufficiently recovered, was removed to her home, very quietly, but under guard. As yet her story was unknown to the public, and it was the Emperor's intention to shield her as far as possible. She was no accomplice in the crime, and her part in the affair of the official papers he was ready to overlook, to a certain degree. After all was settled, Xenia could quietly withdraw to the Duchy, and no one, outside of the chosen few, would ever know that she was banished forever from the precincts of the court. This, in a way, seemed hard, but a monarch must protect his crown. Few, indeed, would have been so lenient, but the Emperor felt that her punishment had already been severe. He hoped that, in time, she would live down her misplaced affection, and wed some noble, a fit mate for so beautiful and accomplished a woman.

The Emperor sprang to the conclusion that Marie had been kidnapped by order of the Secretary. She held knowledge that had proven detrimental to him,

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and this, then, had been his method of revenge. Believing this to be the case, the Emperor spared nothing in the search of the Italian. Every nook and cranny of the city was subjected to the vigilance of the gendarmerie. Long and earnestly, the Emperor pondered the question—what was best to do on the arrest of the Secretary. It was a relief certainly to know, at last, how the Grand Duke met his death. But, after all, they had only the evidence of this distraught girl, and where if innocent was the Grand Duke's valet? Perhaps Xenia had been mistaken. To the Emperor, the most important question was the whereabouts of the girl he loved. He forgot to be glad that the shadow of the tragedy was effaced from his name; he forgot that it had ever rested there. His people loved him and exonerated him—let the world believe what it chose.

What could be promised the Secretary for information about Marie? There was nothing to promise. Trial?—the Emperor shrugged away the thought. That was not in his hands, for he was in honor bound to deliver the murderer to the Czar, when caught.

After Xenia's removal from the Cardinal's palace, the Emperor and the Cardinal, arm in arm, crossed the terraces and the gardens, and entered the Royal Palace, where, with Captain Von Wieben, they discussed the new phases of the situation, and the unexpected developments.

While the three were thus engaged, news was received of the Secretary's capture, and, shortly afterward he was brought in by Otto Von Wieben and Von Arheim, the latter the fool of the masque ball. Captain von Wieben had taken care that the two trustworthy guardsmen knew all that was necessary about the matter, so the Emperor spoke unrestrain-

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edly. First, he bluntly informed the Secretary that the affair of the official papers was no longer a secret. "I am fully aware," said Ferdinand, "that you are in the employ of an official high in the Ottoman's favor. I have known of your treachery for some time—I have had you watched, wondering to what lengths your audacity would lead you. Further than this, I hold information concerning a crime lying at your door, that would hang you on a moment's notice. But hanging, in many cases, is not Russia's way—you have heard of the mines in Siberia and the dungeons? The Czar has demanded your person."

From insolence, the Secretary's expression had changed to abject terror. His face was the hue of chalk, and his mustache twitched convulsively. For moments he seemed unable to utter a sound; his protesting interruptions, which the Emperor had ignored, were forgotten. He was unnerved; his knees smote together. "Mon Dieu!" he wailed, and again: "Mon Dieu! Do not give me up to the Czar! I am innocent—I swear."

"Innocent of what?" the Cardinal fingered the cross on his breast; the officers looked at one another; the Emperor remained silent. Wiebenovitch, thinking his prayer unheeded, plunged on:

"I swear I am innocent! I knew nothing of Nacoli—I saw nothing of him after the masque ball. Oh, Mon Dieu, do not give me up to the Czar. I will answer anything—but not that! Not that!"

The Emperor realized, as did the others, that Nacoli's name had not been mentioned. This seemingly conscious-stricken allusion to Nacoli was not in the Secretary's favor in the question of innocence. But the Emperor did not dwell upon this point.

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"You realize that you are in a very precarious position. Not only does the Czar want you, but the British Government is about to fasten claims upon you as the abductor of Mademoiselle d'Auchausen." The Emperor saw that the American's name was known to the Italian, and felt encouraged.

"I will give you precisely a quarter of an hour to confess," said Ferdinand, glancing at his watch. "At the end of that time, if you do not comply, you shall be turned over to the Minister of Police——"

"Mon Dieu, I will tell. All I know I will tell! But I did not kidnap—no I swear." He knew only too well the tender mercies of the Minister of the Gendarmerie. Few had the iron nerve required to withstand the tortures inflicted at the orders of that seemingly affable personage.

Ferdinand gave no opportunity to fabricate.

"Where is she? Who did kidnap her?"

"Ivan Nacoli."

This startling answer caused the officers to draw back. The Emperor, after the first brief period of consternation, brought his fist down upon the back of a chair. "See here," he said firmly, "It will do you no good to trifle! Dead men do not abduct living people. What do you mean by such an answer?"

Wiebenovitch—or Arioso, to give the Italian his name—hastened to the defense of his statement. His fear was painfully apparent. Perhaps he thought to win some leniency at the Emperor's hands, if he told the truth. At all events, he wished to lengthen the time before he had to face the Minister of Police.

"Impossible as my words may seem, they are true. I pray your Majesty to listen. She was not kidnapped by Grand Duke Nacoli's own hands but by

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his orders, which being carried out after his death, do not change the person of her abductor."

"That sounds more reasonable," said the Cardinal, drawing nearer.

"Be brief," the Emperor commanded sharply, "and hasten. Who did abduct her?"

"The Grand Duke's valet."

"Ach!" came from the little group. "Go on," said the Emperor, "perhaps you can best tell it in your own way, but hasten."

Arioso began his story, his words stumbling over one another in his nervousness.

"Nacoli knew me long ago; we attended the same university—he went his way, and, I, mine, not meeting again for years. Some time ago, he chanced to visit Rome and heard the story of my disgrace which has to you been related. Then, one day, he appeared here. He said to me: 'I am a Prince of the Blood Royal. I am sorely in need of funds and know a way to retrieve my fortunes. I love the great American beauty who has set London mad—she shall be my wife. She is rich.' Not understanding, I couldn't see why he sought me—but I was soon to learn. My help he desired. He vowed by all the Saints to make Auzenburg uninhabitable for me if I refused to aid him. Parbleu! what was I to do? I consented.

"When the British Ambassador's appointment had been announced Nacoli thought: 'Here is the good chance to follow my intended,' so he left London, learning, en route, all that happened in Cozhurst.

"On his arrival here, he went to the Embassy and asked to see the American beauty. He was told that the lady was not there, but, finally gained his point. She was still of the same mind concerning his pro-

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posal, and he threatened to expose her masquerade to you. She laughed at him." The Secretary drew his hand across his brow. "Peste! then my part began. He knew that she would refuse to see him if he called again alone. He forced me to accompany him, and afterward used my position at Court to obtain his invitation to the masque ball. Then came the night of the ball, and the dinner at the Hohenstauffenn and—all that happened there.

"Nacoli hated you because he guessed she cared for you. And he swore by all things good and bad that he would never give her up. At the ball he overheard your conversation with her, what you said about him, and gloried in her refusal to forbid him the Embassy.

"The abduction was all planned—he spared no pains in the arrangements. His valet was second only in ingenuity to himself. The rascal was to take her to Nacoli's castle over the Russian border, where she should remain until she should become Nacoli's bride. There would be no chance of escape. If she persisted in refusing him——" the Secretary shrugged expressively. "She would be ruined in your eyes by the reports I was given orders to circulate here. He had no doubt about her answer. In the end, he would win her, and, for her own sake, she would say nothing concerning him.

"It was I who gave the newspapers the hint of an engagement between you and the Bohemian Princess. You neglected to have it contradicted. He thought that would make her doubt you. It was I who said she had eloped with Von Berewin."

"Were you not surprised at the abduction after the Grand Duke's death?" the Emperor inquired.

The Secretary shrugged again. "Certainly, not.



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The valet—how did he know when he had left the city?"

The Emperor scrutinized the Italian keenly. "What was your idea—even had you promised to circulate these reports for Nacoli—in doing so after his death?"

This was a pointed enquiry, but the Secretary was not taken aback. He would not be alone in his downfall. "I was, by one of the Ministers, urged to do anything and everything possible to help in your disillusionment."

The Emperor did not need to ask the name of the Minister. So Van Hellick had stooped to this! "Where," he commanded abruptly, "is the castle?"

"The roads are very wild and rough. If to me a pencil and paper were given—a map I would draw

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The materials were brought, and the Secretary talked as he drew. "Here is the border, your Majesty, and the pass, the Nobell pass. Here is the village of Nacolidostock—here the wood leading toward the castle. Nacoli went over every phase of the question—every stone of the way for my benefit in case he needed my assistance.

"It was I who wrote that letter you received this morning, and that anonymous letter some time ago. I had one of her letters to Nacoli—if I dare so assert the writing as an imitation is perfect."

At this point the rough map was completed, and it showed an aptness at draughtsmanship. The Emperor was infuriated at the knowledge that the same roof had sheltered a man who held the key to the mystery, and not till facing destruction had he unlocked the door. How much of the story was true remained to be seen.

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### XX.

#### THE FLIGHT OF THE SECRETARY.

"Macklin—Huntington! quick! Meet us at the Northern gates."

It was Johann Von Wieben who spoke. Not often did the sturdy captain of the Guard show such excitement. Macklin understood this to mean search for and find the young Englishman, and join in the quest of the Englishman's sister. He obeyed with alacrity.

Both Johann and Otto were busily giving orders. Perhaps the Emperor, and those who accompanied him, would not reach the capital again before the next day. And these two young men held no idea of being left behind.

No one would have recognized the nation's ruler, or the members of the Royal Guard, in their sober costumes, half concealed by long riding capes. The people in the streets did not deign them more than a glance in passing, and few outside the Royal Palace knew that the ruler had left the city.

Meanwhile, the Cuirassiers had been detailed to escort the Italian to the tower. Arioso had somewhat recovered from his fright, and his cunning once more asserted itself. He focussed all his energies upon a plan of escape. The very mental picture of Siberia made him shiver. The mines with their ceaseless slavery, grating chains, and cruel masters were a living death. Once in the power of the Czar, there would be no chance of freedom. His fertile

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brain was not long in contriving a scheme. The little troop would have to pass through the rougher part of the city, on the way to the tower, and a riot would not be difficult to breed, had he opportunity.

Arioso had no occasion to worry for fear of the citizen's non-attention. The story of his political treachery spread like wild-fire, and, underneath this, was a hint of darker deeds. One by one the waifs of the city, the street-venders, the idlers, gathered at the heels of the little troop, and the Italian swore at them—one and all—and slung taunts at them, in the mad hope that the rabble and the Cuirassiers would come to blows.

Arioso was planning every moment of the journey. There was a sheep-path over the Transylvanians which would take him to Nacolidostock in half the time required by the Emperor to reach it over the main highway. Strangely enough, Russia was his octopus. Czar! pouf!—once in Russia, he had no fear of Czars or Emperors, or Siberias. His brothers of the 'Red Rose' would welcome him joyously—he would be swallowed up in the frozen North. Yes, he would go to Nacoli's castle—warn the valet of the Emperor's coming. They would fly together.

It is remarkable how socialistic and anarchistic tendencies have penetrated into the inner circle of European nobility. Arioso's downfall in his own land had led him into the wilds of an unknown country, and then into the arms of an anarchistic society that was stretching—spreading out over Southern Europe. Nacoli had known of it—had known some of its members, and was in sympathy with it to a certain degree. Arioso had been led by the promise of rewards to desert his comrades, even while professing sympathy with them. He had dreamed of

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power—of trampling on those who had ostracised him. Now, that the power was snatched from his very hands, his socialistic sympathies came crowding back in full force.

The mob grew until the little party found difficulty in proceeding. Seeing the apparent submissiveness of the Cuirassiers, one and all united in an effort to make the route disagreeable. The more daring threw stones and rubbish; the timid added a chorus of hisses. The hail of missiles growing insufferable, Von Arheim who was in command of the party struck at the mob with the flat of his saber. The Cuirassiers did likewise. But, instead of having the desired effect, the onslaught grew more furious. At this point, a mounted officer of the Guard turned into the street, and, seeing his comrades in distress, galloped forward with great gusto. Arriving on the scene, he flung himself to the ground and dealt blows, right and left, with his riding whip. Howls and curses rent the air. In the onslaught, the soldiers were carried apart. Arioso, quick to see the advantage of a mount, caught the bridle, as the horse broke from its master, and, in a flash, was upon the back of the splendid beast and plunging through the mob—to freedom.

"Halt!" shouted Von Arheim in the momentary lull. "Halt! the prisoner!" A shot rang out—one—two—three. "Halt!" Again, came shots. But, lying close to the charger's back, the Italian paid no heed.

Saber and whip had passed unnoticed, but not so the report of firearms. The mob dispersed as chaff before the wind. The Cuirassiers were left in undisputed possession of the street. Horse and rider had passed from view.

The frontier was fifteen miles distant—that was

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judging by the Nobell pass. He did not know the exact distance by the sheep-path. The Mecklenburg was brought to a halt on the summit of the first ridge overlooking the city. The dream of the Principality was shattered forever. One look he cast at the white roofs glittering in the fickle sunlight—then, horse and rider disappeared beyond the hill toward Russia.

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"Curse the foreign dog!" growled the horseless Cuirassier, and let forth a torrent of profanity.

"Good riddance, by the Lord," exclaimed Von Arheim. "Before sun-down, his head will be the subject of a 'want ad' throughout the country. Doubledyed villain, that. 'Tis a pity for such a reptile to escape."

The horseless Cuirassier, who chanced to be Lieutenant Macklin, was of the same opinion. "Let's after him."

Von Arheim was uncertain. "His Majesty ordered us to join party at the Northern gates."

"His Majesty did not order the reptile to escape on my horse," snapped the other. "Do you join Kaiser Fritz with the story, if you choose——"

"Shall we accompany Macklin?" Von Arheim turned to his companions. One of the Cuirassiers spoke up. "Dogged if I care. His Majesty wants the man and the chase will be some excitement."

"Has the Emperor left the Palace?"

"Yes," Macklin was growing impatient.

"Where is the Englishman?"

"On his way to the Northern gates."

"Come! And the five of them set out to procure mounts.

Every instant of delay was insufferable to the

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Emperor. At last the little party was ready: Otto and Johann and two brother officers. Huntington joined them at the appointed place, and regardless of Macklin and Von Arheim's absence, they set forth.

Harold had not been much inclined to answer the summons, as he did not know what had prompted it. His astonishment was boundless on hearing the Emperor's explanations. Ferdinand, usually reticent, withheld nothing from the resourceful Islander, reflecting that the Briton was Marie's cousin, chief adviser and—though this was hard to acknowledge—lover.

The Emperor bore the Englishman no ill will—on the contrary, only admiration and friendship. The barriers of formality were soon thrust aside, and there sprang into existence the beginning of a long and friendly intimacy. Harold related his conversation with Lady Xenia—the conversation which had wrought havoc at court, and, by and by, he told the story of the interview with the opera-singer. How every vestige of discrediting evidence against Marie was cleared away. Harold had discovered the sender of the note found on the night of the disappearance, and, Arioso had added to this the information concerning the anonymous letter, the vilifying rumors, and the note received by the Emperor that morning.

"You were pretty shrewd, Huntington, in your deductions," the Emperor observed, "and, if as you say, jealousy moved Lady Xenia to betray my former Secretary, you have a wonderful understanding of human nature—and of women in particular."

Harold shook his head. "Never!—perhaps I did hit the nail on the head when I amplified that Italian Princess story, but it was only a trial. She seemed

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calm as ever when she left me—I never guessed that the yarn had created such excitement.”

As they talked, they pushed forward vigorously, and soon the city of Auzenburg was left in the valley. The highway carried them up—up among the lesser mountain ridges. At length they came to the pass, a narrow, precipitous way, made difficult by the many boulders and trees swept down by recent snow-slides. The sun now sinking fast, transformed the overhanging peaks into chains of amethyst and topaz and opal—each reflecting on its scintillating peaks the myriad tones of the Western sky. The pass, at last, swerved to the left and descended abruptly. A valley clothed in Autumnal tints, with villages and grazing herds burst upon the travellers. They had entered Russian territory.

A few miles from the border the Auzens fell in with a troop of horsemen who were in pursuit of a bandit chief. The bandits had terrorized the countryside and burned and murdered until the people arose in arms against them. The Russians, learning whence and why the Auzens came, offered to assist in their search for the two ladies, and the two troops joined forces to assail the Castle Nacoli-dostock.

They found on nearing the castle, a saddle blanket with the Auzen arms upon it, and tethered in the stable a horse that the Emperor recognized to be one he had presented to Captain Macklin. The castle itself showed no sign of habitation, but they found upon a thorough search Miss Dorothy. The old lady was half-starved and almost beside herself with fear. So great was her joy at seeing familiar faces, she did not think strange that when her stalwart nephew released her, the Auzen ruler caught.

## The Rose of Auzenburg .

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her hands and spoke to her as a son might have done. They showered upon her a torrent of eager questions.

"Where is Marie?" was the Emperor's first question and thought.

The gladness that had suffused Miss Dorothy's face vanished; the tears welled up in her eyes and overflowed on the gentle rose-leaf cheeks. "I do not know," she answered brokenly.

"Do you mean that she is not here—not with you? Aunt Dolly!" Harold caught her arm.

Miss Dorothy shook her head. "No, she is not here."

Under the circumstance, that the Emperor found no words, is remarkable. He was held silent by a strange, uncontrollable fear, which he dared not voice. In all his life, he had never known a terror of death before. And now it was not for himself, but for her he loved. God could not be so unmerciful! Miss Dorothy was speaking.

"It is a long story. I have not seen her in three dreary days."

The Emperor found his tongue now. "For Heaven's sake Mademoiselle, tell me where she is. Do not keep us in suspense."

"I do not know how to begin," she said tremulously. "I have been mad with anxiety—but I will not dwell on that. You know the evening she was asked to go to the hospital?—we went together. The maid, Falesse, was no more injured than I am now. The messenger told us that we had gone to the wrong place. We re-entered the cab. I do not remember much about what happened after that—I must have fainted. When I revived, we were jolting over a terrible road, and rocking from side to side in the



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most awful manner. Marie commanded the driver to stop several times and finally attempted to open the door, but it was fastened from the outside. We were prisoners in the cab, racing over a wild road through the night.

"At last we reached some hamlet, and drew up at the tavern, which we entered. Marie appealed to the landlord for assistance, but it did no good, as he either could not or would not understand her. Rodrique—he was the driver and also the Grand Duke's valet—told the man that we were mad cousins of Nacoli and he was well paid for silence. It seems Nacoli had bribed the vile valet to kidnap Marie. As I have learned since, Rodrique expected the Grand Duke to meet him there, and if that were impossible to send Wiebenovitch. Well, we waited, but no one came from the Grand Duke, and, Rodrique began to grow uneasy. He promised to take us back to Auzenburg, if we would go peaceably, but just as we were ready to depart, several soldiers entered the tavern. Their leader, a giant in size, spoke familiarly to Rodrique, and asked his errand there. On learning it, he astounded Rodrique, as well as us, with the horrifying news of Nacoli's death. Rodrique, at first, was incredulous, but was at last convinced of the truth of the statement.

"And now I will tell you what happened between Rodrique and the soldier. The valet told the whole story of our abduction, and lamented the fact that since Nacoli's death there would be no chance of reward. The soldier proved to be no other than the bandit king who has been harassing the people on the border. He offered to take Marie and divide with Rodrique whatever ransom he received, and that was agreed upon. Though I cried and pleaded with

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Rahabdalla to take me with them—Rodrique, the wretch! brought me here.” Miss Dorothy could no longer restrain the tears. She covered her eyes and sobbed.

“Rahabdalla! Great Heavens you mean the notorious outlaw and bandit!” Harold stood aghast.

“No other,” wailed Miss Dorothy. “Oh my precious Marie, what will they do with her?”

The Emperor and Harold looked at each other.

“Let’s go after them,” cried the Englishman—“beard the lion in his den.”

Miss Dorothy shrank back in terror. “Oh, Harold what can you do against their numbers? Will they not restore our darling the instant a ransom is offered?” She clung to the young man, but he gently extricated himself.

“I am ready,” said the Emperor, “We will arouse the country-side, if need be. Let us waste no time.”

Miss Dorothy, at length convinced that her prayers were useless, dried her eyes. “What, pray, are you going to do with me?” she inquired.

“That is so,” said Harold perplexed. “We can not take you along.”

Now that the old lady saw that opposition availed nothing, she began to plan assistance. “The coach is somewhere in the stables,” she asserted, “but the coach horses are gone. You know Rodrique fled before you arrived—he told me that the Emperor was coming.”

“How did he know?” demanded Ferdinand.

“Through your Majesty’s Secretary. Rodrique had come up with my evening meal when we heard horse’s hoofs upon the courtyard. Rodrique was so excited that he neglected to lock the doors as he ran out. Wiebenovitch dashed up on a horse—he

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came to warn Rodrique of danger. They fled together."

"Why, Sire, that explains the presence of the horse!" exclaimed Johann.

"So it does. But how did he escape?"

"He was all out of breath, and in a furious hurry. Rodrique said he nearly killed the horse," explained the old lady.

"He did not pass us upon the road." The Emperor was puzzled.

"He said he came by way of a sheep-path, several miles shorter than the main highway."

Many questions arose concerning the return journey. Even were horses available, the coach was useless, as the road was impassable. Harold thought best to return to village, and leave Miss Dorothy and one of the Cuirassiers at the Inn. Macklin's Diana was resaddled, and led into the court, and as Miss Dorothy was by far the lightest in weight, assigned to her.

The Emperor took the direction of affairs in hand, as a man who is born to rule. The Englishman found him daring and level-headed. Jointly they would seek and attack the brigand's lair and their stronghold boldly. Harold had all the assurance that wins success in his nature. That they might fail—that the bandits might out-number their forces did not occur to him.

When he looked back over the events of the Autumn, it all seemed like a fairy story. He had always looked upon Kings as a lingering flame of an autocracy that democracy would soon extinguish. Yet here he was, in Southern Europe, dabbling in loans and political intrigues—and involving himself in an Emperor's armours. And this last mad dash

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to the rescue of the future Empress of the Auzens. Harold tried to picture her letters to him in the future years—letters from a Queen! He thought of the present Chancellor, and the Cardinal whose face was mystically sweet, and the throng of courtiers—No, he would clear out, after to-night. He would return to London. The lights of the village terminated his reflections.

Nacolidostock was no longer tranquilly inactive, as it had appeared that afternoon. The solitary street was alive with the village people. Every hut was brightly lighted—every doorstep thronged with people. The Inn was the only habitation in its usual order—the landlord was silhouetted in one of the windows from which coign of vantage he watched the crowds and the bonfires, and hailed the passers-by. Obsequiously he bowed before the Emperor and his little party and if master inn-keeper recognized the pink-cheeked old lady in the company his face did not betray it.

The banditti had swept down upon the peaceful village and carried everything edible before them—sheep, fowls, grain. The townspeople made wise by previous raids, had stored their grain in the enormous cellars dug back of the Inn, but even this stronghold was robbed. The most timid citizens were keyed to the fighting point and willing to seek the stronghold of the bandits, which was not very far from the Nobell pass. Some Cossacks had arrived only that morning, and were reconnoitering, hoping to catch some members of the banditti in the open.

Midnight approached before the Cossacks rode up to the Inn. The leader spoke to the Auzens. They were eager to capture Rahabdalla; a goodly p<sup>er</sup>-

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was upon his head. The men were tired and hungry, he said. A good meal always stimulated courage, and if the landlord would provide supper, they would afterward start on the perilous quest of the bandit King. They had located his lair. The way was tiresome and in some places most difficult, but not impossible. The Emperor, realizing that his own party must be suffering from want of food, decided the Cossacks' plan good, and he and Harold tried to enliven Miss Dorothy's spirits, pretending to eat and telling her that Marie would be with them on their return.

"I pray Heaven for your success," she said, as they rode away.

The Emperor had explained matters to the Russian leader, and that gruff person unbent considerably. The brown-faced young man had cause enough to seek Rahabdalla's blood. So the girl stolen by the bandit was the Auzen's promised bride? The Russian knew that some of the party were connected with the Auzen court but he did not guess how exalted was the title of their chief.

When the lights of the village were left behind no beacon guided the troop—no moon silvered the white road-way and the mountains of forest. The sky was cloudless. The stars glimmered as though dusted with frost, and upon the blue-black ethereal dome, the millions of lesser constellations made a winding circuit, like a filmy bridal veil.

The troop soon left the main road. One of the Cossacks led the way. Now their route was across a smooth plateau, now along a precipitous mountain side. The boulders and innumerable rocks caused the horses to stumble, and once in a while the Cossack in advance would call out to be wary of the path

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to the left or to the right. Sometimes the Russians grumbled—sometimes they laughed at the little mis-haps that befell. Finally they came to a little mountain torrent, plunging and roaring in its downward course. The trees wove an interlacing network of branches above the water; the bank upon the far side was walled in by a mighty cliff; on the other the shelving rocks formed rustic steps, narrow and in some places rendered slippery by the water's spray. The natural steps disappeared far up in the shadow cast by the trees. Here the party stopped. The Russians, as one body, flung themselves to the ground; the others did likewise.

"The horses must be left here," said the Russian leader, "and two of our men. We do not want any of our steeds stolen."

The Auzen Cuirassiers and one of the Russians were left in charge. "I was no time in locating the bandit's stronghold," said the Russian leader, "but all day we searched for some safe route of approach. This stream is not half so treacherous as it at first appears and doubtless furnishes their water-supply as it disappears underground just above their caves. The place is a wonder—seemingly impregnable."

Few words were spoken along the upward way, as each one was kept busy guarding his footing, and steering himself through the limbs without approaching too near the roaring stream.

At last the stream plunged underground, and a rock wall, some fifteen feet in height barred the way. The Russian leader stopped and turned to the men. "Up—halt," he said shortly. "No one is to fire unless ordered so. The King, gentlemen" he turned to the Emperor, "is not there—or was not this evening, is the reason we deferred our attack. But per-

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haps it is better so, as the others of the vendetti may not be so courageous."

"That is the very thing," cried Harold, "capture his house—take him unaware when he returns. We will greet him on his arrival."

"So I have planned," said the chief, "but young men, let me advise you—one and all—do not think of mercy, for these desperadoes have none. Save your ammunition, and when you shoot—shoot to kill. Rahabdalla is wanted alive or dead, no matter which. He has killed and plundered and burned without mercy and if fortune favor us, may this night be his last raid. They may kill the lady rather than have us recapture her—and such things have been done. Now, instructions—you Auzens will pardon my assuming command of all forces, for I am most familiar with affairs. From the summit of this cliff we can look down upon a sort of rock room—doubtless the kitchen and dining-room combined, as we beheld a fire, and a rude table there this evening. This must be our point of attack. It would be far too dangerous to precipitate ourselves into their house without an idea of the number of our foe. Here they will build their camp-fire—here cools their morning meal. We must await dawn and then attack.

Even as he spoke, a greyiness filtered through the interlacing branches.

"We must have come miles," said Johann.

"Only five miles—roughly guessing," said the Russian leader, "but these roads require time."

One by one they climbed to the top of the cliff—the Russian chief leading the way. Once upon the summit, strict silence was enjoined, and all sank to the rock to await the dawn. Long and silently they

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waited; an hour passed and then along the Eastern horizon the greyness dimmed the stars and spread rapidly over the sky.

Out of the blackness below them, a room appeared like a cave in the rock, and as the light increased, signs of habitation were visible. The table referred to was overturned, and rude dishes were scattered upon the floor. The charred wood of a fire, built the previous night, blackened some of the stone. A huge iron kettle sat nearby. Several cushions formed a cozy resting place at one side of the room; and a gay-colored mantle thrown across a rustic chair fluttered as though swayed by air from within the rude habitation. Soft slippers of various sizes and colors were strewn here and there; and several musical instruments were exposed in utter disregard of the dampness of the night winds. The walls seemed to be covered with skins.

"King Bandit's men are indolent when his Highness is absent," muttered Otto.

"Sh-h," hissed the Russian leader. A head in a yellow turban appeared from a crevice in the rock.

## **XXI.**

### **TO THE RESCUE.**

The greyness of the dawn glowed into rose, and the rose melted into a mist of golden sunlight. The sole representative of the banditti, unconscious of the unseen eyes fixed upon him, emerged, stretched himself, thereby exhibiting full six feet of enviable muscle. He most forcibly recalled to Harold, the imi-



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tation brigands, seen upon the stage. The costume was typical—short grey jacket, yellow breeches—revealing bare knees—and the same soft-soled, bright hued slippers previously noticed upon the rocks. The shirt was open at the throat, displaying the sinewy, brown column of the neck; around the shoulders was thrown a jaunty, silver fringed, scarlet sash. Taking a bucket, he disappeared in the opposite direction from which he had come, only to reappear, almost instantly, with the bucket full of sparkling spring-water. This he deposited carefully upon the rock ledge; he then righted the table and chairs, and set about building a fire. In every movement he was deft and swift; the rude apartment changed magically under his touch, and, soon a savory meal was ready for the table. He made frequent trips to an inner room, whence he emerged with blue earthen dishes, silver which glistened in the morning sunlight, and black bread and cheese. Finally, a second bandit blinked from the crevice. “Up? Has Rahabdalla returned?” He spoke in the Russian tongue.

“No. They have perhaps gone far in the night. Is the English Princess awake?”

The head in the red turban withdrew, and the other continued his preparations. Never a glance cast he at the net-work of vines upon the top of the wall. He was blissfully unaware of his foes. Soon, the second bandit re-appeared, received a generous supply of the meal, and again went within. When he returned the second time, five others, one by one, followed from behind the crevice, and all seated themselves around the board.

A word in the Russian tongue rang out, and immediately the vines were alive with the glint of steel. Men leaped from the wall into the room, and bullets

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pierced the air. The brigands, recovering from their consternation, flashed forth their weapons and valiantly returned the fire. It seemed that the intruders had fallen upon them from Heaven itself. No one had time to help his neighbor to the floor; most of the Cossacks slid down the wall; the others jumped—the peaceful breakfast-room was converted into a seething mass of human figures. The bandits, more accustomed to the knife than the revolver, drew huge dirks, and fought desperately. Colored sashes and turbaned heads were now on top, now underneath, in the hand-to-hand struggle that ensued. Others, aroused by the tumult, rushed, half-clothed, into the open, and joined in the fight.

Seeing the Emperor and Otto in the near distance, the Cossack leader shouted a hoarse command:

“Fight your way to the door!—Go, if you would save her!”

Ferdinand understood, but the thing was more easily said than done. Tearing from him the cape which impeded his progress, he plunged headlong toward the crevice which seemed the key to the strange dwelling. But the bandits were before him. The athletic training which, at one time, had seemed so useless, proved his salvation; he struck right and left, pushing, cuffing, beating a passage toward his goal. Suddenly, he tripped and fell, but was up instantly, and in the grip of a formidable bandit—a giant in size and strength who had lost all weapons in the uproar, but, unhesitatingly closed with the Emperor in a ferocious effort to check intrusion into the interior. Back and forth, they lunged, both savagely resolved—one with the desperation of madness, the other with the determination to win or die.

Ferdinand tried to bring into play the muzzle of

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his revolver, but the bandit caught the wrist that held it, and the weapon was discharged aimlessly. For the moment the desperado was blinded, and, seeing the advantage, Ferdinand forced the weapon up—up, out of his antagonist's grasp, and down upon the knotted fist that grappled him. Blood gushed freely, but the bandit's grip tightened. Suddenly, he swore a terrible oath, and staggered. Otto, free at last, had rushed to the rescue with the desperado's own dirk.

"Go, Sire—for God's sake!" panted the faithful aide-de-camp. Quickly, both stumbled behind the opening in the rocks, and groped along the unfamiliar passage, leaving the bloody scene behind. Unnoticed, they hurried on, unmindful of their footing, until they emerged at the opening of a series of rooms.

The interior of the rock was like a giant shell. Arches and fissures connected one apartment with another. Some of the walls were coated with a white crystalline substance, which shone almost dazzlingly in the light that penetrated from above. The Emperor and Otto found themselves in another hall-way, where, before avoidance was possible, Otto had stumbled against a sleeping brigand. In an instant, the sleeper was on his feet, rubbed his eyes, and, seeing the strangers, at once sprang at Otto. Quick as a flash, the aide fired, inflicting a wound in the brigand's arm, which, however, did not abate his fury. The Emperor returned to the assistance of his follower, but was urged to push on.

Suddenly, a woman's cry rang out clear and startling, and for a fleeting moment a slender figure paused in the far end of the passage—uncertain in the dim light—then sped forward, and passed the

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two men. The Emperor cried to her, but another report of the weapon drowned the appeal. He sprang after her, but fleet as a deer, was she, as she unwittingly bent her steps in the direction of the carnage. Seeing that force alone could deter her, he started in rapid pursuit.

As the girl entered the outer rooms, the noise of the still raging tumult smote her ears. She paused like a startled child, and her hands went up to her panting bosom. The Emperor caught her. She struggled, and struck him, her little fists making his cheek tingle.

"Marie!" he cried—"child, don't!"

At the sound of his voice, her struggles ceased, and, wonder-filled, wide-eyed, she turned to find herself in his arms. Forgotten were Cossacks and bandits in that ecstatic moment of finding each other. She nestled to him, her tear-wet cheek against the brown one, caressingly bent to meet it.

"Ferdinand!" she sobbed, and as her clinging fingers felt something warm and damp trickling over them, she cried, "Ferdinand, Ferdinand, you are hurt!"

"I am not, Darling," he assured her, holding himself a little away, "I am happy now, Sweetheart. But, you must find some hiding-place, till this struggle is over——"

"You—you and Otto are not alone, surely?" she gasped, drawing away as the aide approached.

"No, not alone. Russians and Russian soldiers are with us, and Johann—and Hal." His eyes were full of fondness, but his voice was peremptory. "You must obey——" he said quietly.

She thrilled at the ring of command in his mas-

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terful tones, but the sudden appearance of several Cossacks arrested her joy.

"We've killed eleven—'em," growled the Leader. Rahabdalla, too—he returned. The lady is safe?" and seeing Marie shrink back to the Emperor's side, he continued, "We've won the reward. Half's yours—half ours. Fair?" he smiled—a smile that lighted the scarred face wondrously.

"It is more than fair," the Emperor answered. "We owe you a very great deal, and I shall increase your reward. My friend, I am not the cavalry officer, you supposed—but, I am Ferdinand of the Auzens, and this lady is my Queen to-be."

The Cossacks returned to the assistance of their comrades, and Otto hastened to find Johann.

The Emperor lovingly embraced Marie, "My love—the Rose of Auzenburg—Flower of all the world!" he said.

Thus vanished Count Van Hellick's dream of a mightier Empire, and the hatred between Cozhurst and Auzenburg was buried forever.

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You and I know the outcome of the Balkan trouble. Austria's coup d'état puzzled and thwarted the foreign powers. Bulgaria, supported by an ally so powerful as the Raven, was undoubtedly free. Turkey suddenly subsided, not because her grievances had been diminished, but because the Young Turk movement threatened a revolution within her own borders, and Greece too, dealt her a mighty blow in the annexation of Crete. As for Auzenburg, the fact is evident that she holds the right hand of Austria. The timely loan placed her firmly in her former position of power, and prosperity has showered upon her wealth and plenty. Whether Empress

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Marie was already a Roman Catholic or became one before her coronation, has not been revealed, but we do know that the Pope sent his special blessing to crown the two young heads, as they entered upon their united reign.

**THE END.**



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